

The New Criterion

January 1998

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

Notes & Comments, 1

Reflections on a cultural revolution, V

by Roger Kimball, 4

"The Fifties" on television *by Hilton Kramer, 12*

The destruction of Paris *by Katherine Knorr, 16*

Our debts to English history *by Keith Windschuttle, 22*

Poems *by Harvey Shapiro, Randy Blasing,*

Richard Tillinghast & Steve Kronen, 28

London letter *by Roger Scruton, 32; Theater by Mark Steyn, 34; Art by Mario*

Naves, 39; Exhibition notes by Karen Wilkin & Hilton Kramer, 42; Music

by Lawrence A. Johnson, 45; Concert notes by David Mermelstein & James F.

Penrose, 47; The media by James Bowman, 51; Books: David Ferry, translator

Horace reviewed by D. S. Carne-Ross, 56; Robert Brueggmann The architects &

the city reviewed by Francis Morrone, 60; Martin E. Marty Modern American

religion reviewed by Marc M. Arkin, 64; Helen Vendler Shakespeare's sonnets

reviewed by Paul Dean, 68; Notebook by Mordecai Richler, 73; Letters, 79

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Notes & Comments:

January 1998

“God Decentralized”

“Of all horrible religions,” G. K. Chesterton once observed, “the most horrible is the worship of the god within. . . . That Jones shall worship the god within him turns out ultimately to mean that Jones shall worship Jones.” We had occasion to ponder Chesterton’s remark on Sunday, December 7, when *The New York Times Magazine* favored its readers with a special issue on religion. Elsewhere, the media was full of recollections about the bombing of Pearl Harbor—the event, as Franklin Roosevelt put it, that made December 7 “a date which will live in infamy.” For its part, the *Times* gave us “God Decentralized,” a miscellany of a dozen or so short articles by divers hands on subjects ranging from the problems of interfaith marriages, young American Muslim girls who wear nose rings and baggy jeans, and the monthly meetings of the “Freethought Association” in Talladega, Alabama, where “devout atheists gather for their Sunday social.”

Interleaved among these articles and the usual advertisements for Clinique make-up, Lexus automobiles, and jewelry from Tiffany’s were a handful of brief interviews—with Donna Rice Hughes, for example, who flickered momentarily into public consciousness when her affair with Gary Hart

became public and spoiled his aspirations for the presidency, and who now campaigns against pornography; or with Gail Turley Houston, the Mormon feminist who believes that God is half female and who was denied tenure at Brigham Young University for “publicly contradicting fundamental church doctrine.” Max Frankel, former executive editor of *The New York Times*, devoted his column to explaining that the American press is too “pious” in its treatment of religious matters. “All too often,” he wrote, “what passes for religious coverage is a ritual celebration of papal tours or holy ceremonies.” (It was unfortunate, we thought, that Mr. Frankel had neglected to read the consistently anti-Catholic coverage dispensed by the *Times*, especially its unremittingly hostile treatment of the current Pope.) The weekly food column was titled “Our Daily Bread” and was given over to soup and bread recipes with names like “St. Genevieve’s Soup” and “Brother Juniper’s Roasted Three-Seed Bread.” (“In the simple act of baking,” a caption informs us, “we can experience grace.”) Finally, the magazine’s Endpaper canvassed a dozen celebrities from Geraldo Rivera, the talk-show host, to ex-governor Mario Cuomo on their views about the afterlife.

What the *Times* had given us, in other words, was a journalistic equivalent of Disneyland—a sort of verbal theme park in

which claims of spirituality replaced Tinkerbell. It is not that every article was an exercise in fatuousness. Here and there were touches of genuine pathos—in “Alone in a Lofty Place,” for example, Barbara Grizzuti Harrison’s spare, moving meditation on illness and faith. But the overall effect of this mélange was to induce that sense of nausea that comes whenever a serious subject is treated with the utmost triviality.

Part of the problem was the indiscriminate, all-religions-are-equal approach that the *Times* insisted on adopting. Across the page from Harrison’s piece, for example, was a description of “The Unarius Academy of Science,” “A U.F.O.-oriented New Age group” that gathers annually in El Cajon, California (where else but California?) “to herald the future arrival of ‘space brothers.’” Elsewhere in the issue we learned about the woman who became a minister after having a religious experience at “Womanquest, a Unitarian Universalist gathering on Lake Geneva,” under the influence of “Starhawk, a leader of the feminist spirituality movement who had brought us to the woods to participate in a spiral dance.” Then there was “The Calibration of Belief,” an essay about faith healers who conducted a study of the effects of prayer on people suffering from arthritis. After an initial prayer treatment for everyone, the group was divided in two with half receiving “booster doses of long-distance prayer, without their knowledge, every day for six months.” Or the Baptist church in Louisville, Kentucky, where toddlers sing, to the tune of “Frère Jacques,” “I am special, I am special. Look at me. Look at me.” And so on.

The two-sentence caption on the cover of this special issue of the *Times Magazine* said a great deal about its contents. “Americans are still among the most religious people on the planet,” the editors informed us. “But these days, they’re busy inventing unorthodox ways to get where they’re going.”

About the first sentence: ever since Tocqueville, we have been told that America is an unusually religious nation. Perhaps that was true in the 1830s. But today? In a page of statistics about the current state of religion, the *Times* assures its readers that 96 percent of Americans surveyed affirm a belief in God. But at a time when such a belief can mean little more than anticipation of meeting alien “space brothers” such statistics signify very little. Ninety-six percent of Americans say they believe in God, but the “big question,” as the title of the novelist Benjamin Cheever’s column puts it, might turn out to be “God or BMW.”

Then there is the second sentence, about “inventing unorthodox ways” of practicing religion. “Unorthodox” is a favorite word in this special issue—partly, no doubt, because spiral dances in the woods by Lake Geneva make for colorful copy. But the more important reason is that on all moral and religious matters the *Times* long ago declared itself an enemy of orthodoxy. Hence when it endeavors to cast a friendly eye on religion it winds up producing a carnival of psycho-babble in which genuine religious feeling is indistinguishable from the most flagrant forms of pseudo-spirituality. Indeed, that conceptual muddle is precisely their point. For the *Times*, religion can go unchallenged only if (as one caption puts it) faith is an “option,” an innocuous item in that great consumer smorgasbord that includes expensive shoes, exquisite chocolates, and churches in the Ozarks where real estate entrepreneurs dispense enlightenment along with mortgages and bedizen their chapel altars with the Star of David, images of Jesus, Shiva, Vishnu, and John F. Kennedy. We do not doubt that editors at the *Times* intended to produce a thoughtful reflection on religious diversity in contemporary America. What they have given us with “God Decentralized,” however, is a grotesque parody in which religion emerges as little more than a matter of lifestyle, the latest form of equal-opportunity kitsch.

Privileging the contemporary

It was a little more than a decade ago, in 1984, that the Museum of Modern Art completed its last major expansion. That effort lasted nearly four years, during most of which time the museum was closed or nearly so, with only a token representation of its permanent collection being accessible to the public. The result of this massive expansion was, as we noted at the time, a museum designed “for a public nurtured on blockbuster exhibitions—exhibitions that are as much media events as they are art events, and that have the inevitable effect of arousing, by means of high intensity publicity campaigns, the kind of interest which art in and of itself can probably never fully satisfy.” Hence the prevalence of the museum-as-department-store design, above all the exposed escalators to handle the greatly increased crowds attracted as much by MOMA’s restaurant and atrium as by its collection.

Now MOMA is about to embark on another major expansion—the largest ever. At a recent press conference to announce the architect entrusted with this latest building extravaganza, museum officials were as ebullient as real estate developers unexpectedly presented with a large parcel of Midtown land. Ronald S. Lauder, chairman of the museum’s board of trustees, told the assembled press that the new expansion was as exciting and important an event as the museum’s opening at 11 West Fifty-third Street in 1929. (He meant 1939, but what’s ten years among friends?) David Rockefeller spoke about his “passionate belief” in the arts as a positive force in society. And Glenn D. Lowry, the smooth-talking specialist in Islamic art that MOMA recently appointed as its director, emitted a Niagara of bureaucratish about the museum’s need for space, his effort “to find a way to vitalize the rich store embedded in this institution,” etc.

Anyone who has wondered, as we have, why a museum of modern art should have chosen someone whose expertise was in Is-

lamic art as a director need only have witnessed Mr. Lowry’s performance to understand the choice. Clearly, he was chosen not for his scholarly specialty but for his administrative and public-relations savvy. Mr. Lowry is a consummate performer: one of the new breed of museum directors whose chief qualification is not connoisseurship but entrepreneurial ambition. And we should say straight off that Yoshio Taniguchi, the distinguished Japanese architect chosen by MOMA to undertake its mammoth new expansion, has come up with a design that seems a model of understated modernist elegance.

Nevertheless, anyone who cares about the Museum of Modern Art will have to regard this latest undertaking with profound skepticism. The new expansion will at least double the museum’s exhibition space. But what, pray tell, will the museum put into those new galleries? Mr. Lowry solemnly informed his audience that only about ten percent of the museum’s collection could currently be shown. Of course, most museums can only show a small fraction of their holdings. But what was most ominous in Mr. Lowry’s remarks was his talk of “privileging the contemporary.” More and more, the Museum of Modern Art has skirted its mandate to preserve the tradition of high modernism in order to enter the glitzy, superficial world of contemporary art. The sad truth is that the contemporary art world, so largely given over as it is to various rebarbative political trends, is all but barren of aesthetic interest. Today, for a museum to “privilege the contemporary” is to abandon artistic standards and embrace the repulsive detritus that has illegitimately come to be celebrated as art. That is why anyone who really cares about art should support a moratorium on new museum building. Until there is something new worth putting in galleries of contemporary art, museums should concentrate on their original function: to preserve and exhibit the best art of the past.

The liberal capitulation

by Roger Kimball

Perhaps no phenomenon more vividly epitomizes America's cultural revolution than the student uprisings that swept across college and university campuses from the mid-1960s through the early 1970s. What began in 1964 with demonstrations by members of the Free Speech Movement at the University of California at Berkeley soon engulfed hundreds of campuses and made front-page news everywhere. The ostensible political issues—the Vietnam conflict, curricular reform, housing arrangements for racial minorities, university investment policies, and so on—were quickly assimilated to a much broader emancipationist program. Students may have marched to protest the presence of the ROTC on campus, university rules governing political activism, or U.S. policy in Southeast Asia. But in the end such issues were mere rallying points for a revolution in sensibility, a revolution that brought together radical politics, drug abuse, sexual libertinage, an obsession with rock music, exotic forms of spiritual titillation, and a generalized antibourgeois animus.

It is difficult at this distance to recapture the suddenness and fury of those insurrectionary episodes. The consternation of early press accounts—at the beginning, even *The New York Times* was aghast—shows that the assault, like a kind of cultural Pearl Harbor, caught the nation totally unprepared. Our complacency, as we look back on those events, is one measure of how successful the revolution turned out to be. The whole cul-

tural climate of America, including the climate of higher education, was transformed by that radical assault. What had been a society defined and guided by allegiance to classic liberal ideals—the ideal, for example, that distinguished sharply between disinterested academic inquiry and political activism—suddenly found itself at the mercy of a distinctly illiberal radicalism. If American universities these days are rarely scenes of serious student unrest, that is primarily because there is little that the radicals demanded that they did not get.

Consider, to take just one example, the near universality of so-called “affirmative action”—i.e., preferential treatment based on race, sex, or some other approved badge of minority status. That this bit of Orwellian Newspeak has passed unchallenged into the language is itself an enormous victory for the forces of radicalism. Among other things, it has allowed radicals the luxury of institutionalizing discrimination under the banner of progressive activism. Henceforth, discriminating against certain classes of people can be taken as a means of ending discrimination. In the academy, the result of this mendacity has been to politicize not only college admissions policies, but also hiring and promotion practices for the faculty, decisions about the curriculum, grading, methods of teaching, and student life. In every case, bedrock liberal principles—that preferment ought to be based on merit, that everyone is equal before the

law—were shamelessly abandoned in the face of political pressure. (Perhaps the greatest victory of this sort for the radicals was to popularize the idea that *everything* is political—a conviction that eats away at the very heart of classical liberalism.)

The complex story of student protest movements in this country yields a series of cautionary tales. One of the central dramas concerns the fate of liberalism itself. The disheartening spectacle of liberal university administrators abasing themselves and their institutions before law-breaking radicals signaled not simply a failure of nerve but, even more troubling, a profound crisis in the fundamental principles upon which higher education in Western, democratic societies had always rested. Whether this bespoke an essential weakness in liberal ideology or only a failure of particular men faced with difficult decisions is perhaps an open question. Critics of liberalism will note that its tendency to let tolerance and openness trump every other virtue renders it peculiarly impotent when faced with substantive moral dilemmas: absolutized, “tolerance” and “openness” become indistinguishable from moral paralysis. In any event, one thing is certain: that the liberal capitulation of university administrators in the Sixties and Seventies helped enormously to establish—and to legitimize—the radical ethos of the counterculture.

The basic outlines of this capitulation were present from the beginning. As the sociologist Nathan Glazer observed in “What Happened at Berkeley,”¹ the agitation for “free speech” that erupted at Berkeley in 1964 contained a strong element of hucksterism: “Those of us who watched the Free Speech Movement (FSM) daily set up its loud-speakers on the steps of the administration building to denounce the president, the chancellor, the newspapers, the Regents, the faculty, and the structure and organization of society in general and universities in particular, could only admire the public-relations skill exhibited in the choice of a name for the student movement.”

The catalytic issue at Berkeley was the disposition of a twenty-six-foot strip of land owned by the university at the entrance to campus. The Free Speech Movement wanted to use this bit of university property to proselytize and collect money on behalf of various political causes; the university sought to regulate political activity there as it did elsewhere on campus. The confrontation produced endless rallies, marches, protests, and vigils, some of which involved upwards of seven thousand people and which brought the university to the edge of collapse.

The slogan was “free speech.” But the real issue, Glazer pointed out, was not free speech but “the student demand that the university allow them facilities for full political action and give up its right to discipline them for what it consider[ed] improper use of these facilities.” In other words, the demand for “free speech” was really a demand that the university transform itself from an academic community into a haven for political radicalism. A pamphlet distributed in January 1965 by the FSM put it this way: since “politics and education are inseparable,” the “main purpose of the university” should not be “passing along the morality of the middle class, nor the morality of the white man, nor even the morality of the potpourri we call ‘western society.’”

The authors of this pamphlet were a bit fuzzy about what they thought the “main purpose” of the university should be. Rebellious against the “excessive greed” and “machinery” of the educational establishment was clearly a prominent ingredient. For anyone not caught up in their rhetoric, however, such animadversions tended mostly to reinforce a point that the sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset made in his introductory essay to *The Berkeley Student*

¹ This essay was first published in *Commentary* in February 1965 and reprinted later that year in *The Berkeley Student Revolt: Facts and Interpretations*, a collection edited by Seymour Martin Lipset and Sheldon S. Wolin.

Revolt. “A high incidence of intense student political activity,” Lipset noted, “is in some sense an indication of the failure of a university as an academic community, particularly since in most cases such activity involves a rejection of the intellectual leadership of the faculty, a denigration of scholarship to a more lowly status than that of politics within the university itself.”

Living as we do at a time when virtually all cultural institutions have been politicized by the radical imperatives of the counterculture, it may be difficult to appreciate how thoroughly traditional Lipset’s encomium to academic independence is. It was not so long ago, in fact, that an insistence on the autonomy of intellectual work in the academy was a prime tenet of liberal orthodoxy. The diplomat and historian George F. Kennan, for example, gave expression to this conviction in his once-famous essay “Rebels Without a Program,”² published in 1968 at the height of the radical assault on the universities:

There is an ideal that has long been basic to the learning process as we have known it. . . . It is the ideal of the association of the process of learning with a certain remoteness from the contemporary scene—a certain detachment and seclusion, a certain voluntary withdrawal and renunciation of participation in contemporary life in the interests of the achievement of a better perspective on that life when the period of withdrawal is over.

That this ideal of scholarly seclusion had lately been abrogated on campuses across the country was something that Kennan regarded with profound concern. “The fact of the matter,” he noted, “is that the state of being *enragé* is simply incompatible with fruitful study.” We shall have occasion to

return to Kennan’s essay below. For now, it is worth noting to what extent it represents a species of liberalism that has been undone by its accommodation with countercultural radicalism. Today, no academic liberal would be caught dead repeating Kennan’s analysis. In this sense, his essay serves as a marker of how much liberalism has lost.

The battles precipitating that loss were being waged in the months before and after Kennan published “Rebels Without a Program” in 1968. At Harvard, radical students seized buildings and issued a series of “non-negotiable demands.” At Columbia, a dean was held hostage, the president’s office was occupied, and his files were looted. Similar outrages were occurring at campuses large and small, distinguished and undistinguished, across the country. Taking over buildings and smashing up property had, as *Time* magazine put it in April 1969, become a “deplorable custom.” The general pattern that emerged was irresponsible, self-aggrandizing license on the part of students; fretful collaboration on the part of faculties; and pusillanimous accommodation on the part of administrations. Of course, there were a few exceptions. Edward Levi, for example, president of the University of Chicago, managed to diffuse student protests by rallying the faculty to his side and refusing to provide an audience for grandstanding protesters. But few administrators possessed Levi’s level-headed strength of character. Among the hundreds of incidents, events at Cornell University in April 1969 and Yale University in April 1970 stand out. There were more violent and destructive protests elsewhere. But nowhere was the behavior of administrators and faculty more craven. The protagonists of both events deserve a special place in the annals of liberal capitulation.

In terms of simple collapse of principle, James A. Perkins, then the president of Cornell, must take the palm. Perkins had come from the Carnegie Foundation in 1963 to assume the presidency of Cornell. A Quaker, Perkins was, as *Newsweek* put it at the

² Kennan’s essay, first delivered as a speech at Swarthmore College, was published in *The New York Times Magazine* on January 21, 1968, where it generated enormous controversy. It was reprinted, with thirty-odd responses, as *Democracy and the Student Left*.

time, "the liberal president of a liberal institution." He came brimful of good intentions and fatuous misunderstandings of human nature. One of his first orders of business was to create a Committee on Special Educational Projects to recruit black students whose SAT scores were well below (175 points below, as it happened) the average of Cornell's entering class. Perkins wanted to show what a bit of liberal education could do by way of social engineering. So what if these black students, many of whom were from urban ghetto areas, came totally unequipped to take advantage of an ivy-league education? All it took were a few liberal clichés about the transforming power of education to overcome any objections on that score.

The results of Perkins's experiment ran entirely according to script. The number of black students at Cornell rapidly rose from twenty-five to about two hundred and fifty. Completely at sea, they banded together to form an Afro-American Society. They then began issuing demands: for separate, black-only living quarters; for an Afro-American Studies Program, again, for blacks only; finally, they demanded that Cornell create an autonomous degree-granting college-within-a-college for the exclusive use of black students, the aim of which was to "create the tools necessary for the formation of a black nation." One statement informed the world that "whites can make no contributions to Black Studies except in an advisory, non-decision making or financial capacity."

Of course, such segregationist militancy was totally at odds with Perkins's liberal principles. He had brought these blacks to Cornell to integrate them into society, not to watch them reproduce a segregated environment. But liberal principles, at least in the hands of men like Perkins, turn out to be remarkably pliable. The demand for the autonomous college was presented as an ultimatum. After a certain amount of tergiversation, Perkins acceded, noting petulantly that he was "extremely reluctant to accept this idea of a college exclusive to one

race, but [that he was] not finally opposed to it; it would involve a lot of rearranging of [his] own personality." In "The Assault on the Universities: Then and Now" (1997), the political philosopher Walter Berns, a professor at Cornell in the 1960s, noted that "in the event . . . [Perkins's] 'personality' needed no rearrangement." Temperamentally, he was primed to capitulate. As Perkins himself put it later, "There is nothing I have said or will say which will not be modified by changing circumstances." Events, which began to unfold rapidly, showed that he was not exaggerating.

In 1968, black students at Cornell charged a visiting professor of economics with racism because he had dared to judge African nations by a "Western" standard of development. The administration required an apology from the professor; he complied, but the students were not satisfied and took possession of the economics department, holding the chairman and his secretary prisoner for eighteen hours. The students were never punished. An investigating dean exonerated the professor but charged Cornell with "institutional racism." As Walter Berns noted, what began as an attack on "racism" "quickly became an assault on the integrity of the academic enterprise, an assault that was bound to succeed because it was met with only nominal resistance on the part of the faculty and none at all from the administration."

The following months saw an escalating pattern of "non-negotiable demands," vandalism, and violence. Buildings were occupied, hostages taken, college property destroyed. In December 1968, a white reporter for the college newspaper was beaten up by a black student. When black students requested seventeen hundred dollars to buy bongo drums for Malcolm X Day, the administration compromised by offering them a thousand dollars and flying two students to New York City in the college plane to buy the drums. In February 1969, at a symposium on South Africa, Perkins was challenged to defend Cornell's investment pol-

icy, which included holding stock in banks that lent money to South Africa. During his talk, a black student leaped onto the stage, grabbed Perkins by the collar, and seized the microphone from him. When the head of Cornell's security force rushed to Perkins's aid, he was held at bay by another black student wielding a two-by-four. According to the college newspaper, blacks in the audience responded by beating on the bongo drums the university had so graciously bought for them while Perkins was heard to whisper, "You better let go of me, you better let go of me!"

Matters came to a crisis in the spring of 1969. On Saturday, April 19, during parents' weekend, some one hundred black students walked into Willard Straight Hall shortly before 6:00 A.M. and gave the occupants ten minutes to leave. Eleven doors were broken down with crowbars when occupants were slow in responding. Some thirty parents and forty college employees were forcibly ejected from the building. University officials then stood by passively while the black students armed themselves with knives, rifles, and ammunition. With militants from the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) forming a protective guard outside, the blacks settled down for what turned out to be a thirty-five-hour occupation. According to a broadcast on a student radio show, the protest had been undertaken because of Cornell's "racist attitudes" and because it "lacked a program relevant to the black students." When some white students broke into the building later in the day, a scuffle ensued that sent several students to the infirmary. One black shouted out the warning that "if any more whites come in . . . you're gonna die here."

Central to the demands issued by the occupiers was that disciplinary action against three black students involved in an earlier incident be dropped. Steven Muller, vice-president for public affairs at Cornell, promised to recommend to the faculty that they vote to nullify the reprimands. An agreement was worked out and signed, and

the black students, in an image that made the front page of newspapers across the country, vacated the building clutching rifles and sporting ammunition belts, their clenched fists raised in defiance.

On Monday, the deeply divided Cornell faculty voted, by a margin of 726 to 281, not to dismiss the penalties. "The presence of arms and the seizure of Willard Straight Hall," the motion read, "make it impossible for the Faculty to agree at this meeting to dismiss the penalties imposed on the three students." In response, white and black radicals joined forces and occupied a faculty building. Soon they had attracted some twenty-five hundred students. Thomas W. (Tom) Jones, one of the gun-toting blacks involved in the Straight Hall takeover, informed them that the faculty had voted for a "showdown." The next day, speaking on a local radio station, Jones threatened that seven faculty members and administrators would be "dealt with." "If you believe in your principle sufficiently," he warned, "then be ready to die for it." In response, several professors moved their families to motels for the night. Jones, demanding that the faculty meet again and nullify the penalties, declared that "Cornell has three hours to live. . . . We are moving tonight."

In the event, Jones waited, with the two-thousand or more students occupying the building, until the faculty met the next day to reconsider the demand for nullification. Not all of the professors were cowards. James J. John, for example, a professor of history, eloquently argued that "if we had a good reason for not dismissing the charges on Monday, . . . we have a stronger reason for not doing so today. . . . This university, I believe, can survive the expulsion or departure of no matter what number of students and the destruction of buildings far better than it can survive the death of principle." But apparently a vast majority of the faculty agreed with Max Black, the Sage Professor of Philosophy, who, declaring that "I don't need to be intimidated," assured students that "we want to be your friends." When a voice vote was taken, nullification passed by

an estimated seven hundred to three hundred. As Tom Jones observed when addressing a crowd of students after the vote, "That decision was made right here. They didn't make any decision; they were told from this room what to do."

There were other humiliations. That evening, when Perkins went to address the students, he was publicly mocked by a black student leader who ostentatiously kept him waiting to speak. A white student "picked his way across the crowded stage, grabbed a can of Pepsi-Cola that Perkins had been drinking from, and lifted it high for all to see. Then he drank from it and handed it back to the president." Perkins's response, when he was finally allowed to speak, was to salute the meeting as "one of the most positive forces ever set in motion in the history of Cornell."

And what was the upshot of this disgusting episode? Several of Cornell's most distinguished professors resigned, including Walter Berns, Allan Bloom, and Allan P. Sindler, chairman of the government department. There was some justice. Perkins resigned—or was forced to resign (accounts vary)—and went to a foundation job in New York. But Steven Muller went on to become president of Johns Hopkins University. And Tom Jones, one of the most militant of the black radicals, eventually became the president of TIAA-CREF, the world's largest pension fund. In 1993, Jones was appointed to the Cornell board of trustees. And in 1995, in a final surreal twist, he made a large contribution to Cornell to endow the annual Perkins Prize "for the student, faculty, staff member or program that has done the most during the preceding year to promote interracial understanding and harmony on campus." (Readers nervous at the thought of Jones at TIAA may rest easy: he is now at Smith-Barney.)

These grotesque events were bad enough in themselves. But their real significance was as a prelude to similar depredations elsewhere. As Allan Bloom noted at the time, when the Cornell faculty caved in, students discovered that "pompous teachers who

catechized them about academic freedom could, with a little shove, be made into dancing bears." While it would be a mistake to saddle Perkins with responsibility for all the horrors that have been visited upon higher education since his tenure at Cornell, his capitulation to the totalitarian demands of the student radicals had ramifications far beyond Ithaca, New York. As Walter Berns pointed out, "by surrendering to students armed with guns," Perkins

made it easier for those who came after him to surrender to students armed only with epithets ("racists," "sexists," "elitists," "homophobes"); by inaugurating a black studies program, Perkins paved the way for Latino studies programs, women's studies programs, and multicultural studies programs; by failing to support a professor's freedom to teach, he paved the way for speech codes and political correctness; and of course he pioneered the practice of affirmative action admissions and hiring.

In other words, by his capitulations, Perkins did a great deal to politicize the university and undermine its claims to intellectual independence.

The pusillanimous collapse of Cornell's administration and faculty when faced with threats of violence was in some ways the most depressing spectacle of the whole student protest movement. But perhaps equally, if more subtly, significant for the future of higher education was the rally-cum-university-wide-strike that took place at Yale University in the Spring of 1970. By that time, the antics of student radicals not only had become a well-established, almost habitual, part of university life, but also had forged strong links with radical elements elsewhere in American culture. The *dramatis personae* were nearly always the same: on one side a dithering administration and faculty that was only too willing to compromise on essential principles of academic integrity in the quest to be hip, liberal, "with it." On the other side was a student

body increasingly inflamed by drugs, puerile political slogans, and the astonishing realization that their elders were prepared to countenance almost any outrage as long as it was suitably packaged as an expression of anguished idealistic passion. Indeed, as the decade unfolded, those elders went from countenancing adolescent “idealism” to embracing it themselves. The maturation of the student protest movement turned out to be part of the infantilization of the American intelligentsia.

Like the Cornell debacle, the story of the New Haven rally and Yale strike forms a complex tale with many actors and subplots. The whole story is admirably laid out by John Taft, a student at Yale at the time, in *Mayday at Yale: A Case Study in Student Radicalism* (1976). Here it is enough to recount a few highlights.

In the background was the murder trial in New Haven of Bobby Seale, chairman of the Black Panther party, and eight other Panthers. The Panthers, in collusion with radicals at and outside of Yale, began fomenting unrest in the Yale community and planning a rally to support Seale and his co-defendants. In April, early on in the proceedings, a judge charged two Panthers who were sitting in the visitors’ section with contempt of court and jailed them. This galvanized radical elements in and around Yale, who began complaining loudly that the Black Panthers could not get a fair trial. Fresh from his stint defending the Chicago Seven, William Kunstler—a classmate and old friend of Yale’s patrician president Kingman Brewster—came to New Haven to speak at a Panther fund-raiser held at Yale’s Woolsey Hall. Doug Miranda, area captain of the Black Panthers, began his remarks by asserting that Yale (“one of the biggest pig organizations”) clearly had “something to do with the conspiracy” against the Panthers.

Tensions grew quickly. At a meeting of campus radicals on April 15, 1970, various proposals to help the Panthers were floated, from kidnapping Kingman Brewster and shutting off New Haven’s water supply to

demanding an immediate moratorium on classes and requiring that the Yale Corporation donate half a million dollars to the Panther Defense Fund. A few days later, Miranda told a group of students that they had the “power to prevent a bloodbath at Yale.” He proposed calling a student strike and having Yale demand that the Panthers be released. “There’s no reason the Panther and the Bulldog [the Yale mascot] can’t get together!” The slogans came fast and furious. “Shut it down, or burn!” “If Bobby dies, Yale Fries!”

The two Yale officials who figured most prominently in this drama were the Rev. William Sloan Coffin, Jr., the university chaplain, and Kingman Brewster. Coffin—like the Berrigan brothers—was one of those self-infatuated radicals who poached on the authority of religion to bolster his sensation of righteousness. He was never happier than when organizing acts of civil disobedience. Accordingly, he proposed a march to the New Haven Courthouse, where the demonstrators would then peacefully submit to arrest. Declaring that the trial was “legally right but morally wrong,” he suggested that the Panthers should be set free.

For his part, Kingman Brewster was a model of cunning equivocation. With a symmetry that historians of hypocrisy will admire for decades to come, he showed himself capable of the ultimate pliability. On April 19, a few days before the faculty was to vote on whether or not to strike, Brewster solemnly affirmed Yale’s official neutrality noting that “it would not be proper to assume that justice cannot be dispensed by the courts in this state.” On April 23, as a crowd of about a thousand students and Black Panthers gathered outside, the faculty met. With what might be deemed Perkinsian bravura, Brewster addressed the faculty: “I am skeptical,” he said “of the ability of black revolutionaries to achieve a fair trial anywhere in the United States.” According to Taft, this declaration—which instantly gained nationwide notoriety—was greeted by the faculty with “thunderous applause.”

Brewster then suggested various changes in language: the black demand for a "suspension of normal academic function" would be altered to a "modification" of "normal expectations"; the proposal that faculty "should suspend their classes" would be changed to "should be free to suspend their classes." This was promptly adopted, voted on, and passed. But as one dissenting faculty member observed, "A compromise was absurd. Either a university continues to operate as a university or it doesn't, and to say we shall stop being a university, but just for a while, compromises principles so much that it leaves no basis for existing." The bottom line, as Taft comments, was that the faculty had "voted overwhelmingly to compromise the neutrality of the university. In response to intimidation, they had placed themselves in the hands of an administrator who, in the crunch, took a strictly pragmatic view of his duties as the head of an academic institution."

The liberal capitulation at Yale was perhaps not quite so ostentatiously fainthearted as the one at Cornell. But in some ways it may have been even more fateful. Yale is the more prominent institution. In 1970, the entire nation had its eyes fixed on events in New Haven, which, involving as they did a major criminal trial, implicated the legitimacy of our entire system of justice. Then, too, Kingman Brewster was a more commanding figure than James Perkins. Rich, handsome, articulate, he came to the Yale presidency with impeccable liberal credentials, above all in the area of civil rights. Had Kingman Brewster chosen to take a stand, the faculty might well have backed him up. The history not only of Yale's involvement in that sordid affair but also of American higher education in the decades that followed might well have been different. Like Perkins, Brewster aided in selling out the American university to forces that were inimical to its very essence. If colleges and universities continue to thrive today, they do so grievously compromised by political allegiances that stand in direct

opposition to the ideals of academic independence and scholarly disinterestedness.

As for William Sloan Coffin's infatuation with law-breaking acts of civil disobedience, that, too, has cast a long and obfuscating shadow on American society. Coffin was prominent among those establishment liberals who taught their followers that contempt for the law was fine as long as one was certain of one's own higher virtue. It is an attitude that has taken hold throughout our society, and with disastrous results. As George Kennan observed in "Rebels Without a Program," one cannot purchase leave to break the law simply by being willing to pay the price:

The violation of law is not . . . a privilege that lies offered for sale with a given price tag, like an object in a supermarket, available to anyone who has the price and is willing to pay for it. It is not like the privilege of breaking crockery in a tent at the county fair for a quarter a shot. Respect for the law is not an obligation which is exhausted or obliterated by willingness to accept the penalty for breaking it.

William Sloan Coffin and his like-minded peers did a great deal to delegitimize not only the laws and policies they disapproved of, but also the very ideal of respect for law.

At the deepest level, the liberal capitulation signaled a crisis of confidence that was at the same time a crisis of values. It was not surprising that failures of authority were soon challenged by hostility. As the sociologist Edward Shils noted in "Dreams of Plenitude, Nightmares of Scarcity" (1969), "Where authority abdicates through failures, ineptitude, and weakened self-confidence, it invites aggression against itself." A culture increasingly in thrall to politics is the fruit of that aggression.

Allan Bloom once observed that "the liberal university appears to be both the highest expression of liberal democracy and a condition of its perpetuation." The former, alas, has ceased to be true; and so anyone who cares about the future of this society must hope that the latter is untrue as well.

Telling lies about history: “The Fifties” on television

by Hilton Kramer

Criticism, of course, cannot prevent lies from being told. But it does make it its business to see that they do not establish themselves as truth.

—George Watson, *The Literary Critics*

It is a melancholy task to return to the subject of David Halberstam's book on *The Fifties*,¹ first published to much misguided acclaim nearly five years ago and lately turned into a lengthy television series on the so-called History Channel that is an even worse travesty of the period than the author's original text. The book itself, running to some eight hundred pages of recycled myths, clichés, and caricatures drawn from the received wisdom of the Left-liberal media, is a monstrous compendium of misinformation about one of the most admirable epochs in American history. In the History Channel series this compendium of misinformation is, with a single exception—the segment on the Civil Rights movement in the South—translated into what is little more than a sequence of stupefying historical cartoons.² The result certainly isn't history, and it isn't exactly

journalism, either. It looks more like an extended political campaign commercial in which the ideological battles of the 1960s and 1990s are being reenacted in the costumes and vocabularies of a mythical 1950s.

Regarding every improvement in American life in the 1950s, this version of *The Fifties* is utterly indifferent when not openly hostile. In virtually every act of enlightened generosity and national self-interest by the American government in that period, the History Channel series finds only conspiracy, deception, and paranoia. About the formidable dangers faced by the United States in the 1950s, this cartoon history is either contemptuous, prevaricating, or silent. As for the nation's achievements in that momentous decade, Mr. Halberstam and his guest commentators simply consign them to the Orwellian memory hole. About George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* itself, by the way, which was published in 1949 and became one of the most widely discussed books of the 1950s in this country, contributing a whole new political lexicon to the language, we hear not a word. But then, of course, almost the entire history of literary, artistic, and intellectual thought in the 1950s is similarly consigned to oblivion. In this account of cultural life in the 1950s, pop music and consumer advertising dominate, and what passes for the realm of intellectual accomplishment is left to be represented by the self-aggrandizing hokum of Allen Ginsberg—who, by the way, is never

1 See my article “Myths of the Fifties” in *The New Criterion* for June 1993.

2 *The Fifties*, an eight-hour series based on the book by David Halberstam, is a production of The Fifties, Inc. and was shown on the History Channel on November 30–December 5, 1997. Alex Gibney and Tracy Dahlby were the series directors (The History Channel, \$99.95 for the six-cassette set).

questioned about his role in creating the country's drug culture in the lengthy interview he is accorded in the series.

It is therefore worth recalling for amnesiac consumers of the History Channel—for its producers, too—that in the 1950s the people of the United States acted with extraordinary political magnanimity toward our vanquished adversaries in the Second World War, going to immense expense to lay the foundations for the creation of democratic societies in Germany and Japan, nations which had so recently attempted to destroy us. It was in the 1950s, too, that the U.S. devoted enormous resources to the rehabilitation of Western Europe through the Marshall plan—a political project that effectively saved Europe from the worst consequences of its own political cowardice and moral folly in the 1930s, a failure of nerve that led directly to the eruption of the war itself. Above all, it was in the 1950s that the U.S. shouldered at still greater expense the unwelcome burden of leadership in the Cold War, standing in opposition to a nuclear-armed Soviet Union that was rapidly expanding its domain of totalitarian terror into the far corners of the world—a burden that often met with fierce criticism not only from leftist fools in America but from the intellectual elites in the very nations that would have been the first to perish had American resolve not been so steadfast in its resistance to Communist tyranny.

Virtually all of this political history, which defined America's position in the world in the 1950s, is passed over in silence on the History Channel. In this version of *The Fifties*, political events in Guatemala are given major attention while the political momentum achieved by the Soviet Union is—except for some footage on the launching of Sputnik in 1957—given none. (For Halberstam and company, Sputnik is an OK Soviet subject, for it had the virtue of administering a blow to American pride.) As for the nuclear arms race that dominated the world-historical situation in the 1950s, it is of course depicted on the History Channel in a way that makes the United States the

principal villain of the story. There is never a hint or a suggestion that our policy of nuclear deterrence proved in the end to be a complete success in preventing a nuclear war and ultimately bringing down the Soviet Union. Needless to say, there is no reference to the Soviet Union as an "evil empire," for that would surely have compromised the governing *donnée* of this series: that the principal evil influence on the world scene in the 1950s was the United States.

Given this Halberstam-in-Wonderland view of the 1950s, it comes as no surprise that while Stalin and his immediate successors in the Kremlin remain offstage in *The Fifties*, Joe McCarthy is given top billing. The segment of the series devoted to McCarthy and McCarthyism conforms in every detail to what might be called the I. F. Stone version of the Cold War: to wit, there was no Communist menace either here or abroad, and there was thus no need to worry about Communist spies stealing atomic secrets or penetrating the State Department. The whole Communist issue, in this scenario, was nothing but a malign political fantasy conjured up by unscrupulous Republican politicians intent upon smearing innocent liberals in the Democratic party in order to elect a Republican president.

No doubt I. F. Stone himself would have been summoned for an interview on this subject had he still been living when this History Channel series was in production. Instead, we are treated to a mini-interview with the cartoonist Jules Feiffer, who solemnly recounts for 1990s viewers the desperate fear he felt when he was starting out as a commercial artist in New York in the early 1950s and had, he claims, to conceal his "Stevenson for President" button lest he be taken to be a Communist sympathizer. Gosh! I was living in New York during that first Stevenson campaign in the fall of 1952, and my recollection is that you would have had to penetrate the inner sanctum of the Knickerbocker Club or the Republican Par-

ty's campaign headquarters to find anyone who *wasn't* rooting for Stevenson. But as the script of this History Channel production of *The Fifties* called for total paranoia on this subject, everyone summoned to speak for the camera obliged with a personal tale of political victimization.

Meanwhile, between completion of the History Channel's production of *The Fifties* and its airing of the McCarthyism segment on November 30, a good many more inconvenient facts about Communist activities in this country had come to light, *some of them from the Soviet archives*. So it was left to Roger Mudd, who provided the commentary at the opening and closing of each broadcast in the series, to correct some of the more egregious misrepresentations in what had just been recounted on screen. This unhappy task he performed as best he could, but the script didn't actually allow for much in the way of correction, and it was certainly not to be expected that he would tell viewers of *The Fifties* that they had just been treated to a political fiction.

One of Mudd's comments was sort of interesting, however. "There is an old saying," he told us, that "even paranoids have enemies," and then went on to point out that Julius Rosenberg was now known to have been one of the Soviet spies who stole atomic secrets and that Alger Hiss, too, had "probably" been guilty of spying for the Soviet Union. But by the time these few lines of correction were uttered, most viewers of that November 30 broadcast had likely gone off to the bathroom or the refrigerator. The impact of the basic lie remained undiminished. Still, it was interesting to hear that line about paranoids having enemies described as an "old saying," because in fact it isn't such an old saying. It was well-known in intellectual circles to have been uttered by Delmore Schwartz, one of the most accomplished poets of the period, and was itself derived from a phenomenon that occupied an important place in American social and cultural life of the 1950s: Freudian psychoanalysis.

If, back in the 1950s, anyone had suggested that you could write a historical account of that decade without giving major attention to the role of psychoanalysis in shaping not only the intellectual temper of the period but much about its sexual mores and the conduct of family life, such a suggestion would have been ridiculed as preposterous—and with good reason. Freudian concepts of sexuality and the family, often in popularized versions, exerted a far greater influence on both private life and cultural life in the late 1940s and 1950s than, say, the Cold War. They dominated the advertising industry as well as Hollywood and Broadway, and deeply affected the way many people lived—even people who had never read a line that Freud himself had written or submitted to the ordeals of the psychoanalytic couch. For as W. H. Auden wrote of Freud in the poem dedicated to his memory: "to us he is no more a person/now but a whole climate of opinion." That was still true in the real 1950s. Yet in the History Channel series on *The Fifties*, Freud—like Stalin—remains offstage.

It is not that the series neglects the subject of sex. Far from it. Yet in *The Fifties*, instead of an intelligent discussion of Freud and his influence, we are treated to some very unreliable glimpses of Alfred Kinsey, Hugh Hefner, Marilyn Monroe, Margaret Sanger, and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Thus, just as the history of McCarthyism was treated in complete isolation from the realities of the Communist movement, the subject of sex in the 1950s was treated in complete isolation from the single biggest sexual influence on the life of the time.

It is fatuous, in any case, to suggest—as the History Channel series does—that the young in this country were universally fearful of sex in the 1950s. The 1950s may not have been quite the saturnalia that came into vogue in the 1960s, but then the 1950s didn't produce the horrors of drugs, disease, and illegitimacy that have ruined so many lives in the wake of the sexual revolution of the 1960s. On the subject of sexual freedom in the 1950s, it is morally obtuse to mistake

discretion for repression. Contrary to the hilarious line in Philip Larkin's famous poem, sexual intercourse did not, after all, begin in 1963. And on this subject, too, poor Roger Mudd had some hapless corrections to make, reminding viewers who had not yet turned off the set that, among other things, Kinsey's research wasn't everything he claimed it to be and that Margaret Sanger entertained some pretty bizarre ideas about who should be permitted the freedom to produce children. But who pays attention to corrections, anyway? It's the image on the screen and the gloss given it in a quick, glib commentary that endures in the viewer's mind.

Whether the subject is sex, Communism, the Korean War, or cultural life in the 1950s, the History Channel's series is an even more shameless embodiment of what I wrote about David Halberstam's book in 1993. "What dominates this Left-liberal mythology of the 1950s," I wrote, "is the notion of an entire society in the grip of a politically inspired paranoid fear, abject social conformism, empty-headed consumerism, and spiritual sterility." What was a lie in the book is an even greater lie in the television version of *The Fifties*.

Now it is invariably true, of course, that television distorts, cheapens, and otherwise renders unrecognizable any serious subject it lays claim to, for it is in the nature of television as a medium to simplify its materials in the interest of speed, visual clarity, and instant comprehension. That is why it is such a boon to both political and consumer advertising—and it is also why it is so inimical to intellectual discourse. It can effectively, if superficially, project personalities and evoke dramatic events like natural disasters, but it cannot deal with ideas or explain complex issues that require a good

deal of painstaking explication to be even minimally understood. History is therefore always something of a cartoon show on television.

In the History Channel's television version of David Halberstam's *The Fifties*, however, there is something more going on than the usual cartoon-show travesty of history. Besides the outright lies and distortions it displays in its accounts of the 1950s, the entire series is an unconscionable exercise in political mystification. For what is being played out in this falsified history of the 1950s is a transparent attempt to vindicate the radical politics of the 1960s and its counterculture by portraying America in the 1950s as a nation that was too evil, too silly, too repressed, and otherwise too stupid to merit anything but ridicule and contempt. Call it the Vietnamization of American history, for its driving motive has been to project back on the decade of the 1950s all of the anti-American sentiments that were generated by the political Left in this country in the 1960s as a result of the Vietnam War. Thus, the Korean War is turned into an exact replica of the Vietnam War—and just about everything else in the 1950s is treated to the same process of political transfiguration.

A few years ago, a local paper in the part of Maine where I spend some time in the summer published a letter to the editor in which the writer—an attorney—suggested that the invention of television must be considered second only to the creation of the atom bomb in a list of the greatest disasters that have befallen the twentieth century. After seeing *The Fifties*, I am myself inclined to give television first place.

For further comment on *The Fifties*, see James Bowman on The Media, page 51.

The destruction of Paris

by Katherine Knorr

A few years ago, Eric Rohmer made a movie about the mayor of a village in the Vendée who decides that what his picturesque hamlet needs is not a new library but a *médiathèque*, an untranslatable word for a fashionable multimedia boondoggle.

A *médiathèque* building must be erected, which means bringing in an architect and setting aside space for parking lots and handicapped ramps and the right municipal lighting. In this particular village, it also would mean cutting down the venerable and pleasant tree near the house of the “baba cool” village teacher.

The teacher, not surprisingly, is against the whole project, as are related other stock characters in this curious movie: the newspaper editor, the muckraking freelance journalist, the mayor’s good-looking girlfriend, all for their own reasons. But it is the teacher who sums up certain things best: he has always been against the death penalty, he says, but he is in favor of restoring it, for architects.

Parisians could be forgiven for sharing the spirit of that line. The last twenty years have seen a new dimension in the destruction of Paris, not only for the large projects of François Mitterrand like the Opéra Bastille and the Très Grande Bibliothèque, but also in the spirit of what the French call *urbanisme*, where large parts of poorer neighborhoods are razed to make way for the steel and glass concoctions of real estate promoters and fashionable architects, in the

triumph of vulgarity, greed, and ignorance over the enduring aesthetic of one of the world’s most beautiful cities. Ironically, the most insidious force that is gnawing at the heart of Paris today is what has come to be called *façadisme*, in which the façades of old buildings are kept and the insides transformed, which started as a way to preserve at least the look of Paris and is now dangerously out of control.

With the current economic slowdown in France and the rash of banking scandals, some of the building has been slowed, and everywhere on the north and east side of Paris, like so many bomb sites, are the vacant lots where once stood zinc-roofed houses of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. On the walls of the buildings that remain are the outlines of wallpaper or the ghosts of stairways and chimneys, silent reminders of what was and will be no more; that the graffiti bands have spray-painted many of them adds a particular pathos. In the neighborhoods where façades must be preserved, particularly along the Baron Georges Eugène Haussmann-era boulevards, countless buildings are either bricked up, or already being gutted and turned into some promoter-architect-banker-bureaucrat’s idea of what will make Paris a modern city, ready for the Euro and the hordes of businessmen and information workers just dying to set up shop on the Boulevard Haussmann. Goodbye to the courtyards that gave life and light to these buildings,

goodbye also to the interior buildings, many of which were works of art in their own right, and hello to the industrial marble and fake *pierre de taille* that is *de rigueur* for these builders, Balzacian in their cupidity and stupidity.

At a time when the economic future of Europe is invoked for almost every French government action, there is a growing civil and political reaction to the out-of-control wrecking ball, and some commentators believe that anger about urban renewal led to the Gaullist party's losing several of the Paris *arrondissement mairies*. It appears, however, that the forces destroying Paris will always be stronger than those trying to save it.

Twenty years ago, conservation and reasonable urban renewal seemed to have prevailed over the berserk urban planners who were responsible for the Tour Maine-Montparnasse and the CNIT at La Défense, not to mention the veriginous public housing in the *banlieue*, but who had failed to run the Autoroute du Sud right through the city or to raze the center to build a high-rise business center (Le Corbusier's old idea). It is clear, nevertheless, that the construction companies, the banks, the planners and the politicians who form the unholy alliance pushing for more "renovation" (in the Orwellian language of urban renewal, *renover* means to destroy) have simply changed tactics. And the most recent onslaught threatens to turn the older parts of Paris into mini-Mont St. Michels surrounded by malls, high-rises, and buildings that look like cruise ships. Corruption, cynicism, and outright folly have been the marks of the French government and government-owned banks like the now famous Crédit Lyonnais, and the results are all over the city.

There is much intellectual ferment in France today on the subject of how culture money is spent and how artistic institutions should operate. This includes the question of the threatened monumental *patrimoine*, with a mostly conservative Fronde going after the republic's comfortable commissars.

Still, it is disturbing, though not surprising, how little essential public debate there is over what it is that makes Paris great, over the role of urban planners, over the need to balance the commonweal against the rights of private property and the ambitions of architects. Too many of the culprits are politically well connected; governments Left and Right are terrified of mounting unemployment and thus always ready to bail out the construction sector; and it is political suicide to confront the greatest issue, cars, which have raised pollution to dangerously high levels. It is an ominous sign that the budget for the restoration of the *patrimoine* has been reduced far more than overall cultural spending, suggesting that festivals matter more to budget makers than the true riches of France.

Massive destructions of Paris have taken place through wars, religious fanaticism, royal vainglory, and police concern over controlling the seething Parisian masses. Debates about preserving the older parts of Paris are nothing new: Hugo and Baudelaire railed against architects; arguments still rage over Haussmann's huge projects; and the Commission du Vieux Paris, an energetic ombudsman for the city, is about to celebrate its centenary. So why do the present threats to Paris matter? Leaving aside the obvious aesthetic answer, they matter because even though Paris is architecturally a nineteenth-century city it works in the late twentieth century, and rather better than some younger cities. Public transportation is extraordinary, city sanitation services are legendary, violent crime is low. So there is no good reason for all this destruction, except the rage for the new and the rage to make money, and to hell with both the past and the future.

That a city has to develop according to the vast changes of modern life is self-evident, but the irony of the deep changes being pushed through in Paris today is that, under the guise of renovating and modernizing squalid streets and buildings, providing more housing for Parisians and getting control of traffic, many of the projects have

driven out people of small means while creating sinister urban environments that create delinquency, or fairground-style commercial areas that attract bums and looters. That a city cannot simply mummify its architecture is also self-evident, but the effects of both bad and good intentions are in fact something worse: they are transforming a living city that works, with harmoniously planned neighborhoods and a mix of residential and business development, into a mess of styles that creates crime zones, dead-at-night business districts, and, here and there, little museums where the rich and the foreign can live costume-party lives under the daily inspection of tourists.

What distinguishes the most recent massacre is that, under the code words of modernity and *urbanisme*, what animates the many culprits, in and out of government, is the same kind of contempt for knowledge, tradition, beauty, and truth that animates the enemies of the idea of a Western canon in education and of the more time-tested values of human civilization. For them, all that is old is unimportant unless it can be given a new and politically useful “spin.”

Thus an attachment to Paris’s magnificence is labeled nostalgia by these forward thinkers (many of whom prefer to live in beautiful old apartments and country châteaux), and the critics of urban renewal are called *intégristes*, like the late Monseigneur Lefebvre’s ultra Catholics or like the Algerian terrorist opposition. Paris’s strict—on the books—preservation laws are regularly flouted with barely concealed disdain for objecting petitioners, treated like maiden aunts who don’t understand the ways of business. Old buildings are torn down to be replaced by buildings vaguely in the same style, so that parts of the Marais have become like Disney representations of the eighteenth century, and the modern apartment buildings along the Canal Saint Martin have evocative, old-fashioned names to mask their banality.

Part of what has made Paris a city that “works” is the mixture of the humble and

the great in neighborhoods with distinct looks and legends. In the thirteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth *arrondissements*, particularly in the now lamented Ménilmontant, two- or three-story buildings, courtyards, and ateliers kept these working-class neighborhoods on a human scale. They could have been “rehabilitated.” Instead, they are now overrun by shoddy apartment high-rises with sterile lawns dropped into concrete sidewalks, and they have become places where people are afraid to walk at night. The opposite syndrome is that, through big construction programs, particularly those centered on a cultural project of some kind, normal neighborhoods where people lived, worked, and died are suddenly made trendy, which means they become meccas for fake bohemians, Americans wearing berets, hideous art galleries, and restaurants with fake wooden beams. In either scenario, the neighborhoods essentially die.

Although both advocates of extensive urban changes and those fighting for preservation say now that the worst horrors are over, it seems that few lessons of the past have actually been learned. If it has become unthinkable that one of the major train stations would be razed, for example, or that an eighty-story building would be erected in the Ile de la Cité, the lessons about the consequences for crime or for small business of stupid planning haven’t been absorbed into current thinking. In that sense, recent projects like the development of the east side of Paris and the commercial overhaul of the area around the Gare St. Lazare are in the lineage of the murder of Les Halles.

The moving of the old central market to Rungis was a long-discussed project throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and was punctuated by dire descriptions of the quarter as insalubrious, dangerous, and infested by rats and prostitutes. Although it was clear that the market had to go, it was never clear why the magnificent Baltard pavilions had to be destroyed. Up until the last minute, appeals came from around the world, but folly prevailed.

The building of the Centre Pompidou, which led to important destructions of eighteenth-century buildings, along with the malling of the “*trou des Halles*,” the Quartier de l’Horloge, and the Square des Innocents, have combined in the last twenty years to turn the area from a place vibrant with life, where the *toute bourgeoisie* turned out for the famous onion soup, into a squalid, smelly, dangerous flea market, where cheap clothing stores and fast food have replaced good restaurants and cafés. It is now infested with drugs and with thugs (and there are still rats and prostitutes). Many adults flee the area, where junk food is smeared on the ground, the escalators are broken, a *carnival noir* atmosphere prevails with flame eaters, bongo drummers, and roller-skating acrobats, and where the young panhandlers are truly frightening with their dogs and ferrets. The underground Forum shopping center is dark, poorly ventilated and, in the evenings and on weekends, populated by vaguely menacing hordes of kids with stoned eyes under their baseball caps. Beaubourg itself is closed for extensive and very expensive renovation; it is falling apart. That the Baltard pavillions would have made fine venues for shops and cultural activities is made evident by the single one that survived and was replanted in Nogent-sur-Marne.

Another 1960s project that symbolizes all that is wrong with imposing the latest trendy idea on a time-tested city was the building of the university at Jussieu, which involved the destruction of the Halle aux Vins in the fifth *arrondissement* and, with its tower and great gloomy rectangles on pylons, blights the nearby Jardin des Plantes. It was once associated with all the spring-break ferment of the late 1960s; today, in a fitting development, it has had to be closed for an emergency removal of the asbestos that has caused a number of illnesses among the staff.

Part of the Socialist credo in the 1980s was to favor the buildup of the working-class parts of the city in the east, dangling

before the public the idea that at last the “*prolo*” was going to be favored as the “*aristos*” had been. In fact, between demolitions and the real estate price surge of the 1980s, poorer people were either pushed out of town or into the worst kind of bleak public housing, as various monuments to post-modern taste were scattered over the old meatpacking and *entrepot* district.

In La Villette, the Cité de la Musique built by Christian Portzamparc is not in itself an unattractive building, but it is weirdly out of place, looking like a flying saucer with its landing lights hovering over a blacked-out earth. Although both the Cité de la Musique and the science museum at La Villette have succeeded in pulling in weekend and vacation visitors, as parks on the edge of the city always have, the east side of Paris has hardly become the urban magnet it was supposed to be. The area’s remoteness may indeed have been one of the factors that contributed to the famous mess in which the American Center’s patrons sold its building on the Boulevard Raspail and sank more than forty million dollars into a Looney Tunes Gehry in the Bercy area. For a while, it advertised the usual avant-garde nonsense like lesbian dance troupes, and then went bankrupt.

The Opéra Bastille—whose present director, Hugues Gall, once said the opera was the answer to a question no one had asked—not only destroyed the symmetry of the pleasantly flamboyant Place de la Bastille, but it disfigured the skyline of the whole neighborhood. Its large ungainly front terrace drew in the Rollerbladers. A sure sign that things were going seriously downhill in the neighborhood was when the press started chirping about all the new bars bringing life to the area, and the art galleries started opening (and closing) on the charming Rue de Lappe, which is no longer charming. The Opéra is no great improvement over that circular giant of an earlier era, the Maison de la Radio, and it is sad but by now not surprising to see that it is sheathed in netting because its façade is falling off.

The Très Grande Bibliothèque, a disaster from the beginning in which the government rode roughshod over the objections of the scholars who are its users, is now mostly open. Its immense ungainly towers—which, meant to look like books, resemble suburban public housing—blink with airplane warning lights in the bleak skies beyond the Gare de Lyon. The train station itself, which used to be surrounded by quirky, Simenon-inspired restaurants and cafés, has been built up in the currently fashionable airport-and-ring-road style. Buildings that could have been rehabilitated have been razed to make room for the shabby-flashy buildings favored by airport hotel chains. There are also high-rise bank and insurance megaliths that psychically diminish any pedestrian foolish enough to venture into this maze of mini-freeways.

The down-at-the-heels area around the Gare St. Lazare in the ninth *arrondissement*, a district once inhabited by musicians and painters as well as the new grande bourgeoisie, has been at the center of enormous real estate operations, with heavy involvement by the Crédit Lyonnais, where former bank officers now are being investigated for corruption. A block of nineteenth-century buildings was destroyed directly across from the train station, then rebuilt to house, among other businesses, a stereo equipment chain store. It is a sign of the melancholy state of affairs that the Parisian (whose taxes will be rescuing the Crédit Lyonnais from its enormous debts) must be grateful the mall was built in the alignment of what it replaced, and in a distant copy of the style: it could have been worse.

There are few heroes in the fight to preserve Paris, and many villains, beginning with De Gaulle and particularly Pompidou (who wanted to remake Paris for cars) and Malraux. The various organizations that have fought to preserve the city continue the good fight, and not all the news has been bad. In the 1970s, the Commission du Vieux Paris prevented the destruction of a number of buildings that were to give way

to the projects surrounding the Centre Pompidou. The Gare d'Orsay was saved in extremis. The Grand Louvre project finally allowed serious digging on the Philippe Auguste foundations, now a major tourist attraction. The Grand Louvre project also, to the credit of the Mitterrand administration, got the cars and the tour buses out of the Louvre courtyard. Most recently, brakes were put on a project that would essentially have destroyed the old artisan district of the Faubourg St. Antoine. Serious alarms are now being raised about *façadisme*.

An interesting and potentially powerful newcomer to what *Le Monde* and others wish to call “*les intégristes*” is the quarterly newsletter *MoMus* (for Monuments, Musées, Sites Historiques), set up in 1993 by a group of scholars and journalists including the political scientist Pierre Nora, so closely associated with the question of the French *patrimoine*, the historian Marc Fumaroli, increasingly prominent as a scourge of government cultural policy, and Claude de Montclos, who published *La Mémoire des Ruines* in 1992. *MoMus* is funny and sharp, in the pamphlet style, with unsigned or pseudonymous pieces as well as primers on who does what among all the complicated institutions that, in principle, are there to preserve French treasures.

Part of the effort to fight destruction is to catalogue it, as does the Commission du Vieux Paris and, in more modest ways, SOS Paris, which works neighborhood by neighborhood. A few books provide serious but non-scholarly overviews, notably an updated version, published three years ago, of Louis Reau's controversial, uneven but extraordinary *Histoire du Vandalisme* (Robert Laffont) which starts with the Middle Ages and ends with the Second World War. Michel Fleury, the historian who is secretary-general of the Association du Vieux Paris, and Guy-Michel Leproux added a chapter on the Fifth Republic, and it is very grim indeed. The small publishing house Ivrea has recently reissued a handsome edition of *L'Assassinat de Paris*, Louis Chevalier's classic essay about the deep

changes in French society that are inseparable from the changes in the Parisian landscape (a translation, in slightly different form, is available from the University of Chicago under the name *The Assassination of Paris*). It is a sad and interesting coincidence that Gallimard recently published an excellent biography by Jean-Paul Goujon of the poet Léon-Paul Fargue, whose *Le Piéton de Paris* is a guide to the Paris that was, much like traveling between bars with Fargue in the taxis he preferred to walking.

The battle over Paris has been less spectacular than the debate sparked by Prince Charles's famous comments on the "carbuncle" planned for the National Gallery in London. But the questions that ought to be raised—and mostly aren't—are the same: what makes cities livable, and should the public be at the mercy of a lot of renovating madmen? If Prince Charles has had as much popular success as he has, denouncing the arrogance of architects, it is because so

many ordinary people agree that the older buildings are nicer than the ones that replace them.

If Haussmann's destruction still hurts, nevertheless what has come to be called Haussmannian architecture, though often pompous, is a handsome, workable structure for a city like Paris, and one that doesn't go out of fashion. Postmodern buildings, on the other hand, often look dated before they're even built. You can deplore Viollet-le-Duc's theatrical restorations but surely Viollet-le-Duc's Notre Dame de Paris is preferable to—Frank Gehry's? It has been the sad fate of many of the defenders of Paris that they have been proved to be Cassandras. The current round of destruction, after which so many magnificent *portes cochères* will open—surprise!—onto the bad taste of a few twentieth-century architects, will be deplored some day soon. Never again, it will be said, never again, until the next time.

Our debts to English history

by Keith Windschuttle

Published first, the final book of the new eight-volume Penguin History of Britain is titled *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900–1990*, but its author, Peter Clarke, admits that the period of which he writes has produced only moments of glory.¹ Moreover, the best he can say of the hopes is that not all of them were misguided. He acknowledges that at the end of the twentieth century, many British historians, having seen their country decline from the greatest power in the world, do not believe there is much to celebrate. Although the publisher's jacket blurb declares that Clarke "challenges this vision" by pointing to a much improved standard of living for the general populace, greater social mobility and an extended democracy, the undisguisable tone of his story of political decline belies the feigned social optimism. Indeed, the cover of the book, a black and white photograph of a slightly out of focus Winston Churchill surveying the rubble of the blitzed House of Commons, renders its title—once so rousing when sung to the strains of Elgar—ironic. Since the book was written, the plebiscites for the devolution of Scotland and Wales have set in place a process which, if it continues, means that what was once known as Great Britain will dwindle to nothing more than the European state of England.

¹ *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900–1990*, by Peter Clarke; Penguin, 464 pages, \$29.95; \$14.95 paper.

Given this prospect, Penguin Books might seem to be indulging in patriotic nostalgia rather than publishing acumen in bringing out yet another historical series on a country that has been so often, and so well, served by the genre. There have been so many multi-volume histories of England published in the last fifty years that it may well appear there is little left worth saying. The most monumental was the fifteen volumes from Oxford published between the 1930s and 1960s, but other firms were also prominent. Penguin produced an eight-volume set under its Pelican label in the 1950s, Nelson had an eight-volume series in the 1960s, and Cambridge published a three-volume social history as recently as 1990. And yet, on the strength of the two volumes released so far, not only is the new Penguin series justified but it should be positively welcomed. This is partly because one of these volumes is such a brilliant job in itself, but it is largely because, at a time when the Western world is awash with damning intellectual indictments, both books provide popularly accessible accounts of why the history of England has had such a defining and enduring influence on Western culture and politics: in short, why England has been so important to the development of civilized values in the world at large.

Before going into this, though, it is worth emphasizing just how difficult a task this kind of writing is for its authors. Books

like this are written not as demonstrations of scholarship and originality for the benefit of other historians but as products aimed at the popular market, or what the book trade thinks of as the intelligent generalist reader. This kind of writing requires academically trained authors to pull off several infrequently attempted feats: to condense the state of research in their territory to a readable tome, to write for newcomers who need to have the basics of the field patiently explained to them, to grip these readers with a good story, and to say something of significance about the human condition within the chosen parameters of time and space.

These are important functions for historians because it is when they address themselves to a popular audience that they have the broadest impact on their culture. On the whole, English history has been served well by these series, which have often attracted the best practitioners of each age and have produced some scholarly celebrities, notably David Hume in the eighteenth century and T. B. Macaulay in the nineteenth. The twentieth century's star performer is A. J. P. Taylor, whose *English History 1914–1945*, the last of the Oxford volumes, remains a masterly narrative about that most difficult of periods, his own times. The new Penguin series editor, David Cannadine, gave Peter Clarke of Cambridge University the unenviable task of following Taylor. Clarke's book is well-researched and readable but suffers from two failings: the notion that a rising standard of living and increased longevity can somehow define British history in this period (when every other Western nation enjoyed much the same increases) and his tendency to judge postwar British politicians on the ahistorical grounds of their support for his own pro-European Union prejudices.

The second of the volumes released so far is the one that deserves the most attention. This is the Harvard historian Mark Kishlansky's contribution, *A Monarchy Transformed: Britain 1603–1714*.² Kishlansky covers

the reign of the Stuart dynasty which largely prevailed, despite two revolutions which removed their crowns, from the proclamation of James I in 1603 to the death of Queen Anne in 1714. His book is a great read, fast-paced, dramatic, full of characters who spring animatedly to life as they take their place in the historic procession. Above all, it is Kishlansky's definition of his project as essentially a political history—or to be more precise, a constitutional history—that deserves respect. For he has stood firmly against prevailing academic fashions, has refused to pander to the current predilections of the book-reviewing industry, and has even put a slant on his work different from that intended by the series editor. Kishlansky's brief was, as the series title indicates, to contribute to a history of Britain but, as he confesses in his preface, his is much more a history of England than of developments in Scotland, Wales, or Ireland.

Apart from the opening survey chapter of Britain at the start of the seventeenth century, Kishlansky has entirely omitted what most authors aiming at a contemporary popular audience would assume to be the obligatory topics of social, economic, and women's history. This is partly, he explains, because his publishers have let him off the hook by planning an as yet unannounced series devoted to discussion of that kind. Nonetheless, there would still have been plenty of scope in the major political developments of the period for a more politically correct historian to round up the usual suspects.

For instance, unlike some other recent books on the political culture of Stuart England, Kishlansky's does nothing to curry favor with feminist reviewers or their allies. He does use the term "patriarchy" since it was current at the time in debates about royal power, but notions of "gender roles," victimhood, and other conspicuously an-

2 *A Monarchy Transformed: Britain 1603–1714*, by Mark Kishlansky; Penguin, 400 pages, \$29.95; \$14.95 paper.

achronistic but now almost ubiquitous feminist conceptual paraphernalia are thankfully absent. Or, since we now know that James I was a homosexual pederast and that his son, Charles I, had also dabbled in homosexual relations, Kishlansky might have given a sop to the gay market and introduced some Foucault-type speculation about the “multidimensional sexuality” of the premodern era. Instead, he reveals how such behavior scandalized royal courtiers and was turned to their own purposes by competing court factions.

In particular, he eschews the “history from below” approach that has been so prominent in recent decades in analyses of the most dramatic events of the era. In 1642 the English Parliament usurped the authority of Charles I and raised its own army under Oliver Cromwell to defeat both an invasion from Scotland and the attempts by the king and his supporters to restore his position. In 1649 the Parliament ordered the execution of the then captive king. These events have often been explained as a popular uprising of either a religious kind (the “Puritan Revolution”) or as an expression of the class conflict predicted by Marxist theory (the “bourgeois revolution”). In the hands of the most influential of these interpreters, the Marxist historian Christopher Hill, both religious and political themes are combined and Puritanism is explained as the ideological expression of the nascent bourgeoisie.

Moreover, the adherents of the theory that history is moving by stages toward an egalitarian utopia have also discovered the origins of proletarian democracy and the “general will” in the debates about government conducted in Putney Church in 1647 among the coalition of Presbyterian dissidents and political radicals known as the Levellers. In the sect called the Diggers, founded by the anti-Christian mystic Gerard Winstanley, who demanded an end to wage labour and private property, such historians have seen prototype Communists. From this romantic perspective, the events of 1642–49 amount to the English precursor

of both the French and Russian revolutions and are seen as proof that political revolution is a necessary part of the transition to “bourgeois democracy” and modern society.

Kishlansky stands firm against all this. Though he does use the phrase “English Revolution” to describe the events of the 1640s, his title, *A Monarchy Transformed*, sums up his assessment of the real meaning of the century. From an intermittent assembly summoned on specific occasions (namely when the king wanted to amass additional funds to conduct foreign wars), the English Parliament finally emerged as the principal organ of royal government. From a country teetering on the edge of absolutism (to which many of its continental peers were to succumb), England endured a series of conflicts that eventually produced a constitutional monarchy under which subjects were guaranteed liberty of person, property, and conscience.

Despite the many claims made in the 1990s by the historically uneducated that it was the French and German philosophers of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment who invented the modern notion of liberty—a view expressed perhaps most influentially by Francis Fukuyama—Kishlansky does an impressive job of reasserting the claims of the real source, the English Parliamentarians of the seventeenth century. In 1688, when it presented William and Mary with the crown, Parliament drew up a Declaration of Rights. This was converted in the following year to the Bill of Rights. Kishlansky says that although this Bill was declarative only—enunciating what already existed—“it uniformly declared for people and Parliament against the crown. . . . The people had the right to bear arms, to hold free elections, and to have frequent parliaments in which members could speak openly. They were not to be subject to excessive bail, exorbitant fines, or cruel and unusual punishment.” The king lost his prerogative in judicial matters and was deprived of the ability to raise money outside Parliament. The Bill of Rights also had the appearance

of a contract and implied that William III and his successors were constitutional monarchs.

Kishlansky traces the genesis of these developments in a most illuminating fashion. He shows that in virtually every case it was political conflict and political interests that produced them, not the ideas of intellectuals. Indeed, he shows that the history of ideas in this period always came second to politics. This was true of the notion that government was a contract between the king and the people, a view that received its quintessential expression in the second of John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*. This was published in 1690, some ten years after the celebrated debate in the House of Commons in which the Whig majority had championed the contract relationship against Tory support for the divine right of kings.

It was also true of the anti-authoritarian radicalism of the 1640s. For instance, when the Long Parliament began sitting in 1640, there was not one of its members who questioned the hierarchical nature of English government or that monarchy was divinely ordained. After the outbreak of the first civil war in 1642, however, attitudes changed dramatically with a tax revolt in London, dissension in the army, and the rise of Presbyterian dissent. But Kishlansky emphasizes: "the war created radicalism; radicalism did not create the war." Puritanism and religious millenarianism reached their peak of excitement in 1649 but this was after, and largely fueled by, the execution of the King. "For many, dethroning the King and defrocking the bishops fulfilled ancient prophecies. The Revolution would usher in a new Jerusalem; the nation would be governed by saints, God's own minority through which he would uproot the corruption of this world." And rather than revolution originating in any seething discontent of the populace or their yearning to overthrow existing institutions, Kishlansky shows that the chief actors were primarily concerned with the preservation of their inherited customs and traditions:

In truth, it had never occurred to the leaders of the Army or of the Rump to turn the world upside down, to institute a thoroughgoing social and political revolution. Beyond religion, their quarrel with the King had been to compel him to abide by the settled laws of the nation—those that protected patriarchy, hierarchy and property.

Kishlansky's book is a model not only of interpretation but also of presentation. The way he structures his chapters is bound to set an example that many historians who want to appeal to a popular audience will follow. He starts each chapter with a cinematic narrative of the details of one dramatic event: for instance, the Gunpowder Plot of Guy Fawkes, the execution of Charles I, the great fire of London in 1666. The rest of each chapter both explains the significance of the event and moves the whole story forward. The device works perfectly in terms of both structure and drama.

The author is also impressive in his ability to bring his characters and scenery to life. He captures the Byzantine quality of the court of James I where the monarch displayed, on the one hand, a rare capacity for intellectual engagement as the author of a celebrated treatise on the divine right of kings, and, on the other hand, a prurience that overturned the established decencies of the royal household:

He doted on his Danish wife, Anne, who had already presented him with three healthy children, and [Sir Henry] Wotton reported that "among his good qualities none shines more brightly than the chasteness of his life." This report of the king of Scots did not square with observations made of James as king of England. Some Englishmen found his accent impenetrable, his table manners execrable, and his attraction to handsome boys loathsome.

One of the young men fancied by James was Robert Carr, who, upon being appointed Lord Somerset, rose to become the king's principal advisor and Lord Chamber-

lain. When another court faction, which included Francis Bacon, opposed Somerset's relations to the pro-Spanish and Catholic Howard family, its members recruited George Villiers, described by all who saw him as "the handsomest bodied man in England," as cupbearer at the royal table.

Villiers caught the king's eye and was soon appointed a gentleman of the bed-chamber and, within two years, was made Earl of Buckingham, from which position he not only replaced Somerset but became the most influential official in the kingdom. Though Buckingham was responsible for a series of disastrous military adventures, he retained his favor with both James and James's son, the future Charles I. In Madrid, during a visit by Charles and the king's favorite to propose marriage (unsuccessfully) to the Infanta, the Spanish were shocked to discover Buckingham in the presence of the Prince without his breeches on. Another striking portrait drawn by Kishlansky is of Queen Anne, the last of the Stuart dynasty, and younger sister of Mary, wife of William III.

Anne Stuart was only thirty-seven when she acceded to the thrones of England, Scotland and Ireland in 1702, but she was already an old woman, carried to her coronation in a sedan chair. She had been physically depleted by seventeen pregnancies and psychically debilitated by their futility—not a single child had survived. . . .

Anne was dull, taciturn, stubborn and unattractive. Her conversation was mind-numbing, her taste insipid, her pleasures limited to gambling and dining, losing pounds at one set of tables and gaining them at the other. The Queen had the good fortune to marry below her, for George of Denmark was, if anything, less impressive, and their union was blissful.

In fact, the author's whole chapter on the reign of Anne is a *tour de force*, ranging from domestic details such as the Queen's psychological dependence on Sarah Churchill, to the rise and fall of Sarah's husband, the military hero Marlborough, and to the cul-

mination of her reign in the establishment of a balance of power in Europe and a maritime supremacy which made Britain the dominant trading power in the Mediterranean and the possessor of a series of colonies and territories in the Americas.

The most famous historical interpretation of the events of the seventeenth century is that of the first two volumes of Macaulay's *History of England*, published in 1848. Macaulay was a Whig and regarded his party as the originator and long-term defender of the rights and freedoms won two centuries before. He also thought freedom itself had been gradually unfolding in the ensuing period and would continue to do so. Hence his "Whig interpretation" became synonymous with the concept of progress, an idea that seemed confirmed by the growing prosperity, power, and the extension of democracy of late Victorian and Edwardian England.

The carnage of the First World War, however, and the unemployment of the Great Depression brought into question the idea of ever-increasing progress. The Whig interpretation of history became a convenient straw man, knowingly mocked by intellectuals and held up as a warning to the next few generations of history students of how not to pursue their discipline. Macaulay is still taught today but primarily as a stylist, as an example of how to write narrative, which some traditionalists, and their readers, still prefer to the obliquities of postmodernist discourse. Kishlansky notes that many of Macaulay's interpretations of the political events have not worn well. The most notable consequences of what the Whigs used to call "the Glorious Revolution of 1688," for instance, derived not from the liberal principles of William III and his advisors but were reluctantly conceded by the monarch out of necessity. Kishlansky argues the establishment of the institution of parliamentary monarchy arose out of William's need to call annual parliaments to raise money for the near constant series of foreign wars he conducted during his reign.

But once these concessions have been

made, the general drift of Macaulay's faith in the growth of free institutions remains, at this point in history, hard to deny. Although, as I noted above, Francis Fukuyama is mistaken about the origins of political liberty, his observations about its expansion in recent times are indisputable. The last quarter of the twentieth century has seen not only the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union but also the corresponding demise of dictatorships of the military-authoritarian Right, with new democratic regimes established since 1975 in many countries in-

cluding Greece, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, South Korea, the Philippines, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Peru, Paraguay, Uruguay, and South Africa. The kind of political system that all these countries have embraced has been a liberal democracy of either the monarchical or republican variety, with guarantees of the rights of subjects and citizens, the election of representatives, the protection of property, and the free expression of opinion. In other words, the political principles that the English Parliament originated in the seventeenth century provide the basis of the civilized world today.

Poems by *Harvey Shapiro, Randy Blasing, Richard Tillinghast & Steve Kronen*

1998

These shards of our lapsed rhetoric,
what a generation meant to say,
speak in me still. A flame guttering.
That the slashed landscape, the railroad
yards, the crumbled snow-strewn depots
of a vanquished Europe, all their dying gods,
flame, flare up, add to the smoke
of sacrifice. Millennial stars,
pools of light, sucking the last meaning
from the tremendous century.
The writers, hunkering down like monks
in their stone outcroppings
over the clear blue slate, catching
visions of the dystopian dawn.

—*Harvey Shapiro*

Toward an anniversary

Under the sun back at its height in June
a legless beggar spun round, dervish-wise,
frantic to catch the eye of us passersby
he made sidestep his limp, empty Levi's
twisted in Smyrna's cobblestoned agora
like Caesar's limbs contorted by a seizure.

Winding up a stairway that turned above
the maze of streets into a honeycomb
of shops, we found a goldsmith in his cell
—behind locked doors & in the air-conditioned
isolation that glorifies the end
of this particular millennium—

& asked if he who could work miracles
would gild your hand-carved coral cameo
of Aphrodite in her bliss, a gift
commemorating thirty years intact.
Below, my guilt recalled, one still awaited
wild-eyed the miracle of some small change.

—*Randy Blasing*

Work station

As if mentally punching a time clock
which rings with triggered, impersonal resolution,
I crouch to some task, adhere to a list, and check
items off, releasing the sudden out-thrown
breath that says “Now, *that’s* done!”

With every ordering, each neatness—
dust waxed from a surface, a long overdue letter
written and faxed—snow accumulates,
clocks tick. I scissor stems, put roots in a jar,
advance pale rootlets into the future.

Then suddenly feathered, crest-risen, I peer down
at my turtle’s inch from the blue sky’s vantage point,
eavesdropping on the man at my work station
as I check my messages or run a word count,
evolved to the level of an ant.

Ever again, will jonquils or poetry break
the crust of these well-scrubbed quotidian
satisfactions? When will I read, unassigned, a book
again? Loft a dry fly, drift on breezes that quicken?
Give up all effort—and awaken?

—*Richard Tillinghast*

One wind

for my father

Heart's red fountain; can it soak
the dun acres? North,
an arid wind;
and what does it intend?
Cover, cover the earth,
tangle the hair he stroked.

Bright fountain; can it soak
the bitter soil? West,
an arid wind;
and what does it intend?
Undo the few things blessed,
unhang his scarf and cloak.

Red fountain, saturate
the sandy plain. An arid wind
made the weathervane grate,
blew to the East
and has not ceased,
blew hard and made him bend.

I heard him choke
in a brittle field where a south
and arid wind
still blows as it intends.
It parched his puzzled mouth,
blew far his risen smoke,

blows far and never ends.

—*Steve Kronen*

Letter from London

Europhiles & “Little Englanders”

by Roger Scruton

The issue of Europe, which tore the Conservative Party in two, will not go away simply because the Tories are out of office. For it is deeper than politics, and concerns the whole past and future of our country. The habit has arisen of dividing people into “Europhiles” and “Euroskeptics,” and of denigrating the skeptics as “Little Englanders.” The thought seems not to have occurred to those who take charge of our political education that skepticism towards the institutions of the European Union might stem from a love of Europe and a fear of the nationalist enthusiasms which are constantly threatening to destroy its culture. It is especially galling to be told this now, when the French have just voted in droves for their National Front and German youths are once again taking to the streets in search of the “enemy within.” Or are we to conduct this debate as though there were no such thing as history, and no knowledge whatsoever to be gained from studying it?

Most Euroskeptics are also defenders of the United Kingdom, which grants to the English no Parliament, no sovereign, no army, and no assets of their own, but obliges them to share all these things with the Scots, the Welsh, and a troublesome segment of the Irish. Conservatives remain committed to the Union, since they regard it as a knot which was tied by history.

The process of union with Scotland began in 1603, when King James VI of Scotland also succeeded to the English throne as

James I. It was completed only a century later, with the Act of Union. The Union remained contentious, but it endured. And it endured because it was no one’s decision, because it emerged slowly, as the by-product of more immediate matters, and because it was the natural expression of the geographical, linguistic, and religious contiguity of the English and Scottish peoples.

The European Union, by contrast, is urged on us as a result of political decisions. It proceeds according to a timetable, and hastens forward with an urgency that is totally inexplicable to the skeptical observer, but which has much to do with Chancellor Kohl’s prospects of holding office. In the light of this, we ought to ask ourselves whether the European Union could be as stable and as durable as the Union of England with Scotland.

We should try to ignore the wars and persecutions, the attempted suicide of 1914, the shameless destruction wrought by Hitler and the followers of Marx. For although these are part of history, too, they show the nations of Europe in the poor light that falls on them whenever they succumb to either nationalist or internationalist delusions. Europe is above all a civilization. It includes the music of Germany, which has conveyed Bach’s joyful faith, Schubert’s tender grieving, and Beethoven’s defiant solitude into the minds of every musical European. It includes the language and literature of France and that great experience of Paris, its *splen-*

deurs et misères—the experience of a mystical identity between the city and the human soul recorded so powerfully by Baudelaire, Balzac, and Proust.

Europe is the art and architecture of Italy—which acquaints us with a very different idea of the city, as a community of pilgrims. Europe is also the ecstatic religion of Spain and the threatening myths of the Finnish *Kalevala*. It is a seemingly endless experiment in spiritual possibilities, each unfolding through its own lore and landscape like a tapestry woven by many hands. But when I ask myself what England is in all this, I find myself tending in a new direction. Language and literature have exalted us to the same heights as the French, the Italians, and the Germans. But it is not this that explains our distinctiveness, or our ability to spread ourselves outward, to detach ourselves from the continent of Europe, and to be always elsewhere and elsewhere.

Our apartness is the result of our law: the common law of England, which remains distinct from Scots law even now, after three centuries of the Union. This law, which arose by an invisible hand from the deliberations of countless judges, is the living record of our history. To study it is to explore, case by case, the archaeology of our national genius, to unearth not just decisions, rules, and arguments, but the concrete reality of English life and the moving human conflicts that shaped and reshaped our country. On this wonderful artifact of natural justice has been built another: the system of equity, with its concepts of trust and beneficial ownership. Thanks to equity, the English have been able to build institutions without the permission of anyone but themselves, and to bypass the attempts by *grande*es, monarchs, and Parliaments to divest them of their powers.

Anyone who reflects on the diversity of European culture and who understands just what is European in the King James Bible,

in Janáček's *Katja Kabanova*, in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, or in the decision of the House of Lords in *Rylands v. Fletcher* will know that all these things, deep down, have a common source of life in the Christian religion. But it is not to that source that the European Union refers. On the contrary: the European institutions are secular through and through, animated more by bureaucratic weariness than by the spiritual inheritance of Europe. The seat of power is Brussels—an artificial capital, attached to two unhappy nations, both severed from their history and their linguistic roots by Great Power diplomacy. The directives that issue from Brussels could as well be designed for the administration of Antarctica or the government of the Galapagos Islands as for the well-being of Europe. And the feeble attempts by the overfunded and philistine propaganda machine to provide a marketable idea of "European culture" reveal, in their Disneyland vulgarity, the true source of the federal impulse, namely the television culture of modern America.

To an Englishman, however, this "Euro-culture" would be of no significance were it not for the fact that the spiritual achievement which is ours, and which stands to the English people as German music to the Germans, and the idea of Paris to the French, has been directly discounted by the European machine. The European courts—staffed by judges who have no training remotely comparable to that required for the common law—have begun to unwind our legal inheritance, and thereby to destroy our self-understanding as a European people. This violence done to the English is bound to awaken a reaction, even among those who have no knowledge of the common law, but who respond to it with the instinctive sympathy that comes from living under its aegis. But I suspect that the English experience is only one instance of a feeling that is spreading elsewhere in Europe: that if you genuinely love Europe, then you cannot love the European Union.

Luvvies' Labor lost

by Mark Steyn

Just how fanatically right-wing is Tony Blair's New Labor government? So fanatically right-wing, it seems, that, not content with slashing benefits for single mothers and the handicapped, they're now doing the same to—gasp!—the arts. Eight months after the revolution of May 1, just about every theater known to the casual observer—from the Gate in Notting Hill (one of London's most "influential" fringe houses) to the King's Head in Islington (the capital's first-ever pub theater)—is trembling on the brink of closure, its funding wiped out by the heartless, philistine Tories . . . er, I mean Socialists. The Tories are also heartless and philistine, of course, but, after wearily enduring eighteen years of one savage indictment of Thatcherism after another from these theaters, they felt it would somehow be bad form to retaliate by closing them down, especially given the paltriness of the sums involved (the Gate has been pushed to the brink of the abyss because the London Arts Board has denied it fifteen thousand pounds). New Labor, by contrast, has a ruthless streak that Conservatives can only marvel at.

In a way, we have been here before. In 1979, during the "Winter of Discontent" union strikes, the legitimate stage, as one horny-handed son of toil to another, was officially on the side of the workers. But, irked by the shutdown's disruption to the National Theatre, Harold Pinter, Peter Hall, and other panjandrum of the arts had

a momentary descent into depravity and voted Conservative. The blood of the Thatcher Terror is on their hands. "I look back on that vote with disbelief," said Pinter eighteen years later, on the eve of the 1997 liberation. "I realized within weeks that it was a stupid, totally irresponsible, and shameful act." But, even in the privacy of the ballot box, Pinter and Hall had never expected the incoming Tories to be *their* government. The scale of betrayal this time is a thousand times greater. As David Hare, London's most prominent political (i.e., left-wing) playwright, observed with some bitterness, the message from the new government is: "Those who loyally supported Labor and kept faith with its ideas through the dismal years of Thatcherite stupidity can now basically go hang."

Poor old Hare. In recent plays like *Skylight*, he's examined the liberal conscience from every conceivable angle and managed to miss the only angle that matters: that the modern liberal, at least in his New Labor manifestation, has no conscience. To be sure, the government, in this as in so many areas, is the beneficiary of timing. What's up on stage—the justification for public funding—is not exactly impressive at the moment. For example, the Royal Shakespeare Company may still be a lustrous name in America, but back home it looks as if it will be lucky to see out the millennium. Having virtually withdrawn from its London base at the Barbican and

retreated to its Stratford home, it no longer seems very sure of what it is: a directors' club, but unable to attract any first-rank directors; a great acting company, but with a conspicuous lack of great actors. Seeing the RSC's *Cyrano de Bergerac* (at London's Lyric) and Frank Langella's own *Cyrano* (at New York's Roundabout) within days of each other left me with a slight touch of nasal congestion. Measured nose to nose, I prefer Langella's glittering actor-manager hamminess to Anthony Sher's more cerebral approach, which in practice is hard to distinguish from a general failure of nerve. But the most sobering point of comparison is what's going on behind the principals. While Gregory Doran's RSC production retains all the crowd scenes, Langella has chosen to strip the play down to Everyman basics, eliminating the seventeenth-century Gallic lushness and tossing overboard the hordes of supporting characters until only a dozen remain. Yet Langella's is a genuine company, with strength in depth from its leading man down, while the RSC staging seems pathetically undercast and little more than a star vehicle for Sher. Whether or not because of the general air of decay, the RSC no longer attracts the kind of solid character actors needed to sustain even Rostand, never mind Shakespeare. And, if the RSC can't plausibly pass itself off as a *company*, then what is it for? You don't need a permanent company to mount one-star revivals: any old West End journeyman producer can do that.

It's not inconceivable that direct control of the RSC could pass into the hands of Chris Smith, Britain's first openly gay cabinet minister, and a man who goes by the quaintly Stalinist title of Secretary of State for Culture. The other week, after all, he took over the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden and its two resident companies, the Royal Opera and Royal Ballet. Neither is actually in residence at the moment: the House is closed for two years for rebuilding and so both companies have shacked up with what are felt to be vaguely

unsuitable neighbors—the Royal Ballet at Labatt's Apollo, a rock venue sponsored by a brewery; and the Royal Opera at the Shaftesbury Theatre of Comedy, which has traditionally preferred such reliable trouser-droppers as *Run for Your Wife*. The Royal Opera is the first company to have literally brought the House down, and, shrouded in scaffolding, the ruins of the House have now brought down the company—or, at any rate, its management. The inability of the board to find a home for the Ballet and Opera during the closure period was one of the factors that attracted the attention of the House of Commons Select Committee on Culture. To Americans, the existence of such a committee may seem bewildering, but, given that NEA defenders are arguing for Euro-style arts subsidy, it's also a timely reminder of the world that awaits. In Britain, arts grandees proceed smoothly from one job to another, acquiring *ex officio* baubles along the way. Thus, shortly after becoming chairman of the Royal Opera House, Mr. Peter Gummer was elevated to the peerage and decided to take the impressively feudal moniker of Lord Chadlington. In an exquisite vignette of British life, a friend subsequently called up Covent Garden and asked to speak to him.

"Chadlington . . . Chadlington . . .," murmured the telephonist, thumbing through her personnel list. "Sorry, luv, I've got no one here by that name."

"I think you'll find," said the caller patiently, "that he's your chairman."

"Really?" she said. "I thought the chairman was Peter Gummer. He didn't last long, did he?"

No, he didn't. In December, Lord Chadlington and his entire board resigned after a damning Select Committee report that demanded all their collective heads. The Culture Secretary, Mr. Smith, is now in charge of the place pending the appointment of suitable New Labor-friendly appointments. As the report concluded, "We would prefer the Royal Opera House to be run by a philistine with the requisite financial acumen than by the succession of opera and

ballet lovers who have brought that institution to its knees”—Mrs. Thatcher couldn’t have put it better herself, though it’s an odd sentiment to hear from a solidly Labor House of Commons.

In fairness to Mr. Gumm . . . Lord Chadli . . . whatever he’s called this week, most of the damage was done by Sir Jeremy Isaacs, the smug TV executive brought in to run the Opera House in recent years. The Select Committee was shocked to find that Isaacs had let the place go a year without any financial controller and that, as far as finding out what any particular production or department or service cost, there were, for all intents and purposes, no accounts—no books of the sort a second-hand car dealer would be expected to keep, never mind a multi-million pound enterprise endowed by the Treasury to the tune of over ninety million pounds and by the National Lottery with an additional seventy-eight million (Labor still believe in the redistribution of wealth: under the Lottery, the weaknesses of the masses fund the excesses of the elite). In my experience, the Royal Opera House’s indifference to book-keeping is pretty typical. At an interminable public forum on theater-funding a while back, I wondered why everyone had made a fortune from *Les Misérables* except the RSC, the original coproducers (Cameron Mackintosh has taken over a billion dollars from the show while the RSC’s received maybe five million). “But Mark,” wailed Terry Hands, then the artistic director, “we don’t want to spend our time looking at the balance sheets. We just want to make art.” Most of us feel the same way: no one wants to pore over ledgers; hairdressers just want to dress hair. But only the subsidy junkies of the arts world seek to trumpet their immunity from such cares as proof of their integrity.

With the Tories’ traditional arms-length approach to arts subsidy, they could more or less get away with it. But nothing about New Labor is arms-length. I have a low opinion of the Royal Opera—its current *Merry Widow* at the Shaftesbury is a leaden affair next to which *Run for Your Wife* and

When Did You Last See Your Trousers? are models of sophistication and nuance. But I seem to be the only one around who finds it odd that a company which derives only a third of its income from public funds can suddenly be annexed by the state on no more compelling pretext than a government report. The late Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha personally drew up the theatrical program in Tirana, removing Shakespeare’s tragedies from the schedule on the grounds that life in Albania was now so perfect that the people had no need of tragedy. The Secretary of State for Culture has not yet reached that degree of micro-management, but he takes his title seriously.

Under the Tories, the Department of Culture was called the Department of National Heritage, which isn’t much better but suggested a more modest ambition. While the Gate Theatre begs for the restoration of its fifteen thousand pounds, the Department of Culture’s budget has more than tripled in four years, from nine million to twenty-eight million pounds, and its civil servants now number just under four hundred. What do they do all day? When the new department was created, London’s “luvvies”—as the theatrical community is known—rejoiced that “the arts” would now have a seat at the Cabinet table. Instead, their voice has been diminished, drowned out by the new arts bureaucracy. Those of us who think a Secretary of State for Culture is not a proper position in democratic government can only say we told you so.

There may be more of this ahead. The government has appointed a working party headed by Sir Richard Eyre, recently departed as National Theatre director, to investigate the future of lyric theater in London. When I first heard this, I was amazed. “I don’t believe it. There’s a working party to investigate the Lyric Theatre?”

“Not *the* Lyric Theatre,” said my friend. “Lyric theater generally. You know, theater where there’s singing and dancing and so forth.” Whether Sir Richard is the man to do this is a moot point. His reign at the

National ended this year with a revival of his 1980s production of *Guys and Dolls*—an oddly lifeless piece and a particularly cruel example of how structures set up to preserve art end up instead by embalming it. But, leaving aside Eyre's qualifications for the job, the very fact of the working party's existence is testament to the long reach of the Labor government. They claim the working party was established because the Royal Opera, Royal Ballet, and English National Opera—all of whom may wind up in a shotgun *ménage à trois*—had run into financial difficulties, threatening people's jobs. On the other hand, half of the country's remaining coal miners are likely to lose *their* jobs next year, and no one's set up a government committee to look into it. After years of philistine Tory indifference, Britain is now learning what it's like to have a government that's *too* interested in the arts.

Defending himself against accusations of anti-Americanism, Harold Pinter wrote in 1994 to *The New York Review of Books*, "Of course there is a difference. Hitler, Stalin, Mao, in one way or another, intended the death of millions. The U.S. has, I suggest, accepted that the death of millions is inevitable if its 'national interests' are to be protected. . . ." Pinter is doing his usual "moral equivalency" line here: if anything, he seems to prefer the more straightforward mass murderers; say what you like about the old brutes but you knew where you stood with them, not like these Reagan and Thatcher types with their false veneer of civilization. . . . You could make the same case for New Labor: at least they're smashing the arts openly, closing down the poor old King's Head and the Greenwich Theatre *intentionally*; Thatcher just let things drift, like she couldn't be bothered. Theater companies lost their grants under the Conservatives and some closed down, though offhand the only one I remember is the old Savoy Opera company, custodians of Gilbert and Sullivan, which suggests there wasn't much ideological animus at play. To their credit, New Labor seems to have

declared all-out war. Indeed, traditional lefties think the government has singled them out for old-fashioned Stalinist reasons—*pour encourager les autres* or, at any rate, *encourager les* financial markets. "It is not enough," says David Hare, "to convince the markets of your financial correctness merely by robbing the poor of their traditional benefits, or by coming down hard on single mothers. It is also necessary to assert your virility by hitting hardest those sections of the community likely to squeal loudest"—i.e., him.

There's surely a play in all of this. But what, on stage, is the theater's response to life under New Labor? Business as usual, it seems. Stephen Churchett's *Heritage*, at the Hampstead Theatre, proclaims in its title its twin themes of personal and national inheritance: Harry, played by George Cole, is a Chelsea Pensioner—a veteran of the Great War—whose regimental home, the Royal Hospital, is about to be sold off as a conference centre. In other words, it's an exploration of the conflict between tradition and modernity—between a man who has done his duty for Queen and Country, and a flashy marketing huckster on the make. Churchett apparently dislikes commercialism and the soundbite culture, but the numbing obviousness of his argument, played out by lame caricatures, is only a windier version of soundbite fatuities, and a couple of hours in a shopping mall provides more real drama. The play's final image—the ghost of the Chelsea Pensioner in his distinctive scarlet tunic returns to stand guard over the new conference centre—is striking only in its ineptness. The image of a prima ballerina backstage at Labatt's Apollo would be just as potent, but the peculiar, subtle combination of factors that have brought her there would seem to be beyond Churchett or even David Hare.

After eighteen years of Conservative rule, the London theater's problem would seem to be that, as any Chelsea Pensioner would be the first to point out, they can't stop fighting the last war. (On the last night of *King Lear* at the Old Vic, Sir Peter Hall

launched a stinging attack on—who else?—Thatcher.) One of the city's most distinguished fringe houses has just begun its twenty-fifth anniversary with a play whose preoccupations and sympathies are almost identical to Churchett's. At the Bush, Helen Blakeman's *Carnival* is set in a dreary Welsh seaside resort (there is no other kind) between 1994 and 1996, in what the British call a caravan but to Americans would be more like an extremely pokey motor home. The play is about the nobility of labor—a wide-spread belief in Britain now reduced to a few dwindling outposts in the legitimate theater. Once again, we are invited to consider tradition versus modernity—the idealism of the old against the grab-it-all mentality of the young. So the older man is a union member on the Liverpool docks, on strike to protest the hiring of non-union labor; the younger man is a scab who takes the older man's job. And their various sexual, political, and financial betrayals shrivel away to who'll get control of this rusting hulk in a windswept Welsh hellhole. The play's central symbol, and its suffocating decor (including a fruit bowl whose contents are arranged alphabetically), is as telling as anything: most "New Britons"—the baying morons weeping and a-wailing over Princess Di or the killer nanny or whoever this month's saintly pin-up is—wouldn't waste ten minutes in a Welsh caravan; they've long since traded it in for two weeks on the Costa Brava, where it's sunnier, the sex is easier to come by, and you've got all-night karaoke. *Carnival's* fusty setting is a reminder of how British dramatists, in venerating the working classes, inevitably wind up patronizing them.

Given these obsessions, it's no wonder the colossi of New Labor disdain the theater. Pop stars like Oasis and movie types like Sir David Puttnam and Lord Attenborough are in and out of 10 Downing Street all the time; the flashier ones have been given semi-governmental jobs to "promote" these approved expressions of

Tony Blair's Cool Britannia. But the theater, after years of comparing Thatcherite entrepreneurialism to the Third Reich (the RSC's *Singer*) and government policy in Northern Ireland to anal rape (the National's *The Romans in Britain*), now finds itself shunted to the sidelines with other quaintly outmoded old-time socialists like the miners' leader Arthur Scargill and Viscount-turned-commoner Tony Benn. According to David Hare, "All of us who sense the steady impoverishment, both of fabric and ideals, under a government which we voted in not to mimic Toryism but to replace it, await some more serious statement from someone in power." Where on earth was Hare during April's election campaign? It was perfectly obvious that the new government was voted in precisely because it pledged to do nothing but mimic Toryism. Tony Blair was playing the part of the perky chorine in *42nd Street*, sent out to take over from a fading leading lady: "You're going out there a youngster but you've got to come back a star!" A fresh face, a bright new smile, but the same old songs. That's probably not the sort of theatrical analogy Hare values, but it's sounder than any of his recent plays.

Meanwhile, for those of us who bemoan the homogeneity of British dramatists, the Bush's twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations featured one or two exceptions to the rule. *The Bush Theatre Book* and a gala evening at the Duke of York's informed us that in 1973 the theater mounted its first play by an Oxford undergraduate—one Tina Brown. Tina, unlike most of her fellow Bush dramatists, has managed to escape the dreary terraces of West London in fairly spectacular style and is now one of America's leading Blair boosters. Her rise is eerily foretold in her second play, which opened at the Bush in 1977 and was pithily summarized by *The Shepherd's Bush Gazette*: "English girl goes to New York and is forced rather quickly to come to terms with American life." Even on the London fringe, life occasionally imitates art.

Art

Richard Diebenkorn at the Whitney

by Mario Naves

Long the bellwether of twentieth-century painting and sculpture, the Museum of Modern Art has had a substantial influence on how we view the modernist enterprise. Under the guidance of Alfred Barr, MOMA's founding director, the museum rooted itself in the European avant-garde. Despite the many shifts—ideological as well as aesthetic—that it has undergone in recent years, the museum has, more or less, remained true to Barr's vision. Which is not to say that MOMA is without important shortcomings. Who hasn't bemoaned the rigidity of MOMA's masterplan, one that compromises the complexity of history for a streamlined and steamrolling succession of -isms? Consider the situation of those artists whose work is hung outside of the galleries, in the hallways of the museum. Occupying a kind of limbo, half in and half out of the museum, they are nonetheless deemed significant enough for transitory acknowledgment. Museums can't display every object in their collections, of course, but sometimes recognition is indistinguishable from condescension. It is worth recalling that until recently Max Beckmann's *Departure* was installed in MOMA's second-floor hallway near the restrooms.

Similarly, Richard Diebenkorn's *Ocean Park No. 115* (1979) has been exhibited—when it is exhibited—in a stairwell on MOMA's third floor. This is a thankless spot for any artist, but given a painter of Diebenkorn's caliber, such placement is in-

explicable. Shunting his work off to a nook following the galleries dedicated to Abstract Expressionism, Pop, and Minimalism makes chronological sense, given that Diebenkorn (1922–1993) did not reach his full artistic maturity until the late 1960s. But this relegation to “Oh, by the way” status is scandalous—especially considering some of the artists who *are* deemed fit to grace MOMA's major display spaces. For Diebenkorn's *Ocean Park* paintings and related works on paper are among the artistic triumphs of the latter half of this century. Did Richard Diebenkorn ever paint a picture as dazzling as de Kooning's *Attic*? Probably not. Yet after visiting “The Art of Richard Diebenkorn”¹ at the Whitney Museum of American Art, no one can doubt the power and aesthetic accomplishment of this “California artist” at his best.

The scare quotes are deliberate. The la-

1 “The Art of Richard Diebenkorn” opened at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, on October 9, 1997, and remains on view through January 11, 1998. The show will travel to the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth (February 8–April 12, 1998), the Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. (May 9–August 16, 1998), and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (October 9, 1998–January 19, 1999). A catalogue of the exhibition, with essays by Jane Livingston, Ruth E. Fine, and John Elderfield, has been published by the Whitney in association with the University of California Press (276 pages, \$85; \$35 paper).

bel “California artist” dogged Diebenkorn throughout his career. Geographically speaking, it is accurate—California is where he spent the majority of his working life. Yet, because of its implied parochialism, the label is also misleading. It may seem ludicrous to maintain that Diebenkorn is undervalued—a full-scale, traveling retrospective is evidence of how seriously his work is regarded. But Diebenkorn’s achievement has been, one feels, only grudgingly acknowledged, particularly in New York. Although tied to the mainstream of modernist art, Diebenkorn always set himself apart. Consequently, his relationship to the New York art world and to Abstract Expressionism forms a curious tributary to the received history of postwar modernist art. Diebenkorn’s paintings have little to offer to anyone who embraces the contemporary clichés about the nature of the avant-garde. They are not, in short, fast, fashionable, or profane. A prominent New York art critic once snidely dismissed Diebenkorn as a painter who made modern art safe for the middle class. Such baloney reveals more about the indigenous provincialism of the New York art world than it does about Diebenkorn’s art.

The show begins with the artist’s first mature phase while under the spell of Abstract Expressionism, follows him through his figurative period, and flowers fully in a generous sampling of the *Ocean Park* paintings. The narrative of the exhibition, if we can call it that, shows that Diebenkorn was not, as some would have it, given to stylistic caprice. Hindsight is twenty-twenty, but the shifts of emphasis throughout his career were always well-reasoned responses to the aesthetic logic of his art. Their culmination in the *Ocean Park* series, while not preordained, is utterly natural. The Whitney helps us appreciate this logic by providing windows between some of its galleries, so that, for example, we can glimpse *Ocean Park No. 128* (1984) while traversing the early portions of the exhibition. What at first seems a bit of museological gimmickry

is really a confirmation of continuity. The Whitney’s installation of “Richard Diebenkorn” is (in the artist’s words) as “straight and simple” as the work itself.

For Diebenkorn the “straight and simple” was achieved through a process he likened to cultivation, wherein missteps and corrections are part of the act of painting. Is it any wonder that the young Diebenkorn was drawn to the tangled surfaces of Abstract Expressionism? His work from the early Fifties is typical of the time: brushy areas of color offset by spidery lines demarcating planes and establishing their own wiggly independence. His line owes an obvious debt to de Kooning—“The way he used that line,” Diebenkorn once exclaimed, “that was really *it* for me!”—but one can also divine the influence of Rothko, Motherwell, Clyfford Still, and William Baziotes. Each early painting reads as a distillation of Ab Ex stylings without becoming a blatant pastiche. Yet despite some irresistible passages, many of Diebenkorn’s Ab Ex canvases are predictable. They are, to be sure, handsome paintings by a sharp disciple of the New York School. But they are the paintings of a disciple, nonetheless. If there is a point in Diebenkorn’s career when the term “parochial” applies, this is it.

By the time one reaches the *Berkeley* series of the mid-Fifties, Diebenkorn’s paintings flounder; they don’t enliven Abstract Expressionism as much as they give in to it. For Diebenkorn, anyway, the turn to representation was an aesthetic elixir. Almost immediately, his work gained in clarity. The landscapes, still lifes, and figures that came to populate his canvases anchor the work formally as well as thematically. The sense of overlooking a vista that was tacit in the abstractions becomes patent. Works like *Cityscape* and *Cityscape I* (both 1963), with their flattened and tilting spaces, show an artist learning to structure a composition in a way that mirrors its rectangular support. This explicit geometry reaches its apotheosis in the *Ocean Park* paintings, which Diebenkorn began making in the late 1960s. It must be conceded, however, that the

weakest aspect of Diebenkorn's figurative phase are the figures themselves. The human form, at least in the oil paintings, impedes Diebenkorn's achievement of pictorial coherence.

The irony is that Diebenkorn was a master of figure drawing. If there is a complaint to be lodged against the exhibition it is that more figure and still-life drawings are not included. As it is, the show does include one magnificent drawing: an untitled ink and watercolor from 1967 depicting a seated woman, pitched just off of center, wearing a floppy hat. Here the figure has autonomy—it hasn't been squished into a composition—and provides an occasion for focus and discovery. One can see Diebenkorn delight in the frumpy silhouette of the woman's hat or the challenge of capturing an impromptu gesture. The pressure of the woman's environment is still felt, but it doesn't shut the picture down. With its intense blacks and ever so slightly modeled figure, *Untitled* is a masterpiece.

Whatever the limitations of Diebenkorn's figurative paintings, it was through them that he came to realize the organizing framework which would engross him for the rest of his life. What is remarkable about the *Ocean Park* paintings is how their structural solidity coexists with an almost precarious translucency. In them, space is inferred and oblique. The stray diagonal or grouping of bars and rectangles toward the top or sides of the canvas suggest looking through a window or an aerial view of landscape. (Diebenkorn did, in fact, create a series of aerial-view drawings of Arizona as a project for the Department of the Interior in 1970.) They are paintings of distances—high and open—rather than settings we can enter. Nevertheless, the canvases themselves, almost always scaled slightly higher than they are wide, are proportioned to the human form. While the paintings often threaten to dissolve into a shimmer of atmosphere and color, they are held in check by a diligent scaffolding that is Mondrian's gift to Diebenkorn. Because he applied oils thinly—obscuring but not obliterating pre-

vious states of the painting—Diebenkorn lets us see the painting built, so to speak, from the ground up. Each one is as immovable as it is evanescent. The *Ocean Park* series is the resolution, stout and sure, of architecture and light.

Matisse is the crucial source for the *Ocean Park* pictures. Not a few observers, after visiting the "Matisse in Morocco" exhibition at MOMA in 1990, remarked upon the similarity of the backdrop for *Zorah on the Terrace* (1912) to Diebenkorn's paintings. It is a not adventitious historical rhyme, as Diebenkorn would have been the first to admit. Yet to claim that he did little more than finesse (and fret over) Matisse for almost thirty years is to mistake a profound engagement with tradition for accomplished hackwork. With their pensive harmonies and stoic elegance, the *Ocean Park* paintings divulge their antecedents without reiterating them. Indeed, the influence of Edward Hopper, with his stark light and plainspoken geometry, is present in these abstractions to a greater degree than formerly acknowledged. Something of Hopper's astringent melancholy survives in these blocky compositions. Diebenkorn knew that the hurdle of tradition is not to recapitulate history, but to make tradition speak in a form that is as individual as it is contemporary. He also knew when it needed prodding. By transmuting his forebears into something personal and fresh, Diebenkorn claimed his status as an unapologetic modernist.

The *Ocean Park* paintings, commanding and unpretentious, constitute the main part of Diebenkorn's legacy. That they were created in a culture so often antithetical to their deliberate rhythms says much about his mastery. (It also says much about the possibilities of painting.) This retrospective makes for a refreshing jolt of sanity—and, it should be added, beauty—in an art world given to excess and faddishness. Even the miniature version of the show in the lobby gallery is a tonic; the paintings on cigar box lids—off the cuff and on the money—are worth the price of admission alone.

Exhibition notes

"Ten Paintings by Paul Cézanne
Formerly in the Auguste Pellerin
Collection" at Sotheby's, New York.
November 7–November 12, 1997.

One of the best shows in recent months lasted less than a week. I mean the exhibition in November of ten paintings by Paul Cézanne at Sotheby's, New York, prior to their sale. This dazzling array of little pictures spanned the first two decades of the painter's career, from the early 1860s through 1880. At one end was a fierce, hallucinatory self-portrait, painted when Cézanne was not yet twenty-five; at the other, a cool, carefully observed head of his friend, Victor Choquet, painted in 1880. The emphasis was on eccentric early efforts: witness a thickly troweled portrait of Uncle Dominique (c. 1866), posing patiently in a turban; the brutal *L'Autopsie* (1869), with its livid, propped-up corpse; and the first version of *Une Moderne Olympia* (c. 1870), Cézanne's rock-hewn commentary on Manet's celebrated nude, here folding in on herself instead of boldly displaying her assets, as though retreating from the scrutiny of her thickset, black-clad protector.

Some works were familiar, some not. An 1872 view of the Halle aux Vins at the Quai de Bercy, opposite the cramped apartment Cézanne occupied with Hortense Fiquet and their infant son during an early sojourn in Paris, figured in the recent retrospective of Cézanne's work at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, as did the glorious *Lutte d'Amour* (c. 1879–80). At once an homage and a challenge to the tradition of the Venetians and of Poussin, the rhythmically stroked, tense *Lutte* instantly made explicit Cézanne's roots and pointed both to his own future and to what Picasso and Matisse, among others, would derive from him. The rather clunky *Promenade* (c. 1866)—part fashion plate, part genre scene—was last exhibited in the 1988 survey of Cézanne's early years, while the glittering *Don Quichotte, vu de face* (c. 1875) had not

been seen since 1954. This surprising picture, crowded with figures and animals, tipped, flattened, and cropped like the revelers in Cézanne's early, Delacroix-inspired free-for-alls, seemed about to fragment under the pressure of its narrow dimensions, its staccato diagonal strokes threatening to detach completely from reference.

Best of all was *Cinq baigneuses sous des arbres* (c. 1875)—last on view in the 1989 Basel survey of Cézanne's bathers—a miniature masterpiece in which the five nudes are distinguished not only by their poses, but by individual flesh tones ranging from pearly white to ocher to rose, with astonishing touches of pink, blue, and green that somehow create heft and meatiness. The anthropomorphic limbs of the flanking trees echo the gestures of the bathers, while broad, repetitive pats of pigment knit together an expanse at once seamless and full of air.

What these paintings had in common, besides small size, was rigor and a refusal to be ingratiating. They weren't signature Cézannes, but rather *recherché* items for the obsessed, informed connoisseur—not surprisingly, since all ten pictures were originally owned by Cézanne's most ardent early supporter, Auguste Pellerin (1852–1929), margarine tycoon and collector extraordinaire whose name appears in the provenance of more than a hundred and fifty of the artist's works (out of an *oeuvre* of less than a thousand). Roger Fry believed the collection so essential to an understanding of Cézanne's development that he illustrated his pioneering monograph largely with works owned by the industrialist. Pellerin's passion for Cézanne was the culmination of his adventures as a collector. He began by acquiring the sort of works a man of his position was expected to own in the last decades of the nineteenth century, but jettisoned them once he discovered Corot. Corot gave way to the Impressionists, who were soon restricted principally to Manet, but Pellerin liquidated even his superb and extensive holdings of this painter (which included *A Bar at the*

Folies-Bergère, 1881–2, Courtauld Institute, London) after he began to dedicate himself to Cézanne in the 1890s.

Pellerin eventually acquired major works from all periods—still lifes, portraits, landscapes, card players, late bathers—now among the treasures of museums around the world, but the most remarkable aspect of his collecting of Cézanne was his taste for difficult pictures. He owned large numbers of the superheated allegories, the enigmatic erotic scenes, the stark portraits, and the often ham-fisted narratives of the painter's early career, unconventional works that tell a great deal about Cézanne's evolution, but that speak eloquently only to an engaged viewer willing to make an effort—"painter's paintings," in other words, like the ones exhibited at Sotheby's. The serendipitous overlapping of this brief exhibition with the Metropolitan Museum's wonderful show of Degas's collection made for interesting comparisons, since both the industrialist and the artist seem to have responded most strongly to works revealing process and development—and their taste in Cézanne's nudes was remarkably similar.

It's frustrating not to know more about Pellerin, a man who went from living with polite academic art to gritty pictures like *Don Quichotte*. Little information exists apart from auction and dealers' records that allow us to track when he bought (or sold) what. The informative short article in John Rewald's recent catalogue raisonné and the introduction to Sotheby's catalogue (which is indebted to Rewald) both rely heavily on comments by Pellerin's contemporaries and those privileged to visit him in Neuilly; apparently no diaries or personal notations exist.

Pellerin's tough, adventurous eye was obviously trained by the work he lived with. Absent any intimate documents, we can only speculate about what motivated him, but it would be staggering—and informative—to see an exhibition dedicated to his now widely dispersed collection. Not only would it bring together some extraordinary pictures, but it could serve as a history of

taste at the turn of the nineteenth century. In the meantime, the chance to see ten works selected by this exacting collector was exhilarating, even if it made me fantasize about owning *La Lutte d'Amour* or *Cinq baigneuses*.

—Karen Wilkin

"Stanley Spencer: An English Vision" at the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C.
October 9, 1997–January 11, 1998.

When, in 1980, the Royal Academy in London mounted a mammoth retrospective of the paintings and drawings of the English painter Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), the show was greeted by the British public as a major event—almost, indeed, as a national celebration. Newspapers devoted huge features to Spencer and to the village of Cookham, thirty miles west of London, where he lived most of his life and which features prominently in his work. Crowds in record numbers filled the capacious galleries of the Royal Academy—from which august institution, incidentally, Spencer had resigned in 1935. (He was protesting the Academy's rejection of two paintings—*The Dustman*, or *The Lovers*, which is included in "Stanley Spencer: An English Vision" at the Hirshhorn Museum, and *St. Francis and the Birds*, which isn't.) Critics did not hesitate to pronounce Spencer a great master, especially for his overscale religious allegories of village life—the same critics, by the way, who a few years later would be lavishing similar praise on *The Naked Shit Pictures* by Gilbert and George. Like the work of the latter, Spencer's are pictures that often tell sexy stories—though the sex, in Spencer's case, is strictly heterosexual—and there is nothing in art that the British public loves so much as pictures that tell stories. It only added to Spencer's appeal that his work otherwise rejected just about everything associated with modern art—everything, that is, except sexual candor. At least for the duration of the Spencer retrospective at the Royal Academy, which numbered some 280

works, the British public could bask in the illusion that the modern movement had never come to Britain at all and dream for a while longer about the good old days before the frogs and the yanks spoiled everything.

It was not to be expected that “Stanley Spencer: An English Vision,” which began a North American tour at the Hirshhorn Museum this fall and early winter, would inspire anything like this celebratory response. On this side of the Atlantic, where Spencer’s work is known only to specialists in modern British painting, his English village allegories—a curious mix of Christian mythology, bawdy high jinks, and country-life folklore—merely look dated and quaint. In other words, provincial. This is partly because none of the artist’s mural-scale allegories—the pictures that English critics like to call “epic”—are included. (They were probably considered too large to travel.) Without those outsize pictures, however, the undaunted ambition that Spencer brought to his principal artistic project can scarcely be understood, never mind experienced at first hand. But it is also the case that Spencer’s *was* a provincial vision even in his most ambitious paintings.

Seeing the smaller versions of these allegories in the Washington exhibition, I was reminded of how essential those happy, milling crowds were to the whole spirit of the 1980 Royal Academy show. For between the myriad figures depicted in the paintings and the many live figures in the galleries looking at the paintings, there was an unmistakable physical resemblance and a distinct reciprocity of feeling. In Spencer’s folkloric vision of village life, the visitors to the exhibition saw something of themselves—or, more precisely, something out of an imagined common past—they obviously preferred to the more prosaic and disobliging contemporary world they were condemned to settle for in real life. This gave to the exhibition its persuasive atmosphere of yearning and nostalgia. That is not something that is within the power of many modern artists to achieve, but it is a power

achieved at a price—for it nullifies the artist’s exportability. At the entrance to the show at the Hirshhorn Museum, visitors were advised that Spencer’s art had successfully transcended “his so-called Englishness,” but most of the paintings told a different story.

The principal exceptions are the so-called “sex pictures”—the nude portraits of Spencer himself and the two wives he was erotically obsessed with. In these and a few other portraits of women, Spencer becomes a quite different artist, a very modern hyper-Realist, cheerfully celebrating his sexual desires. There is no trace of religiosity, no village-life folklore, no more bother about communal ritual. There is only the *homme moyen sensuel* painting his desires without mythological artifice or religious subterfuge.

Spencer himself acknowledged the difference, of course. Speaking of the *Double Nude Portrait: The Artist and His Second Wife* (1937), which is included in the Washington show, he observed that “there is none of my usual imagination in this thing: it is direct from nature and my imagination never works faced with objects or landscape.” Alas, he was usually a better artist when he put aside the burden of his busy imagination to paint directly from the passions that governed his own life. But it is the imaginary past that is conjured up in the “epic” allegories that has made him a hero in England. In Washington, however, where the galleries devoted to “Stanley Spencer” were almost empty on the afternoon I saw the exhibition, the few people in attendance—mainly artists and art students—were spending most of their time concentrating on the “sex pictures.” At least that part of the Spencer *oeuvre* has proved to be eminently exportable.

After Washington, the exhibition travels to the Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporáneo in Mexico City (February 19–May 10, 1998) and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco/California Palace of the Legion of Honor (June 8–September 6, 1998).

—Hilton Kramer

Music

Chicago's new sound

by *Lawrence A. Johnson*

"Make no little plans" was the advice of Daniel Burnham, the man who, in 1903, designed and built the original Orchestra Hall, home of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Whatever other reservations can be voiced about the current management of the orchestra, even the flinty Chicago architect couldn't accuse the powers that be of taking timid half-measures in the recent renovation of the hall. Three years and \$110 million in the making, the celebrated orchestra's new, greatly expanded digs at 220 South Michigan Avenue were rededicated in October as Symphony Center.

The extensive renovation comes at, as the Chinese say, interesting times for the fortunes of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. The tenure of Daniel Barenboim as the orchestra's music director—launched in 1991 with starry, well-received events such as the clever, semi-staged performances of Mozart operas—has now settled into a kind of sanctioned and complacent mediocrity, with performances that are occasionally inspired, often commonplace, and sometimes downright awful. While the technical level of individual musicians is higher than ever, the standard of the ensemble has slipped, to the point where sloppy playing is too often the norm, a far cry from the orchestra's razor-sharp corporate musicianship under the late, lamented Sir Georg Solti. Barenboim remains indisputably one of the world's greatest pianists, yet on the podium his performances often suffer from a desire to

make an Individual Statement, which can result in a mannered, portentous brand of music-making, heavy and rhythmically dull—a kind of Furtwängler Lite, without Furtwängler's dynamic tension or architectural grasp. By all accounts, a charming, cultured, and highly intelligent man, Barenboim, after six seasons as music director, remains a remote and enigmatic figure to many in the Chicago audience and, for that matter, to many in his orchestra.

Yet with the opening of Symphony Center, the suspicion, mistrust, and ill will of recent years between the orchestra's management and local critics were cast aside—for the moment. While some skeptics have grumbled that the massive renovation was extreme overkill—a case of bulldozing one's house for better ventilation—one can hardly castigate the planners for not heeding Burnham's advice. Spearheaded by the energetic, often controversial president of the orchestra, Henry Fogel, the costly expansion and refurbishment of the Chicago hall (designed by architect Joseph Gonzalez of the prestigious firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, with Lawrence Kirkegaard as project acoustician) adds a new wing west and north of the existing structure, encompassing a 300-seat recital hall, an interactive learning center, and a 250-seat restaurant. The exterior roof has been raised twenty-five feet to increase bass response and reverberation time by about 50 percent, and the air-conditioning and heating has been relo-

cated to another building to reduce noise. The most striking difference is the new terraced seating behind the orchestra and the imposing eleven-ton steel and glass canopy over the stage, designed both to reflect sound more directly to the audience on the main floor and to enable the musicians on stage to hear one another better.

There is no doubt that, architecturally, the new Symphony Center is a stunner, close to an unqualified success. The gold trim and new terraced seating behind the stage lend a warmth and pleasing intimacy to the previously rather sterile room. The cool lines and understated formality of the new wing's ninety-foot rotunda, winding staircase, and multi-level arcade create a dignified but open and unstuffy environment. The only design disaster is in the new Buntrock Hall, where the cement walls make it look less like a chamber music venue than a prison recreation yard.

But the *raison d'être* for the extensive refurbishment is acoustical enhancement, and, while there is definitely a greater warmth, resonance, and bass response, there remain, despite hosannas from some of the press, persistent and unsettling problems. To these ears there has been a major trade-off in brilliance, clarity, amplitude, and sonic impact, a good chunk of the top frequency range seemingly sheared off along with the original roof. With weeks of renovation work remaining and much fine-tuning still ahead, at this writing the acoustical revampment is very much a work in progress.

On the first Saturday in October, with the threat of a strike averted by an eleventh-hour agreement the previous night (the last-minute holdup for extra Rheingold, not the orchestra's finest hour), Chicago's glitterati turned out in their well-heeled best for the sold-out gala opening concert. After a sumptuous banquet, the glitzy first-nighters and a phalanx of journalists and music critics from the four corners of the globe repaired to the gleaming new Symphony Center hall for the main event.

Preceded by the season- and hall-opening National Anthem—a nice tradition in an era not ostentatious with patriotic fervor—and much self-congratulatory speech-making, the concert proper opened with the “Nimrod” section from Elgar’s *Enigma Variations*, played in honor of Solti. The long string-lines of the late-Romantic elegy formed a fitting homage to the former music director laureate, performed with a loving legato by the burnished strings, nicely molded by Barenboim.

The evening’s requisite star-power was provided by Barenboim’s colleague Plácido Domingo, who, in excerpts from Verdi’s *Otello*, showed once again why he reigns supreme today in the role of the haunted Moor. While Finnish soprano Soile Iso-koski’s light timbre didn’t quite match the celebrated tenor’s virile vocalizing in the Act One duet, Domingo’s anguished rendering of *Otello*’s death scene brought a galvanizing theatrical intensity that belied the gala-concert setting.

Some of Daniel Barenboim’s best moments in Chicago have come with his performances conducting from the keyboard, and so it proved again with his stylish performance of Mozart’s Piano Concerto No. 27, the centerpiece of the tripartite program. The relaxed bonhomie of the finale was tossed off with just the right delicate vivacity, yet it was in the central *Larghetto* that the performance really shone. With beautifully poised phrasing, Barenboim underlined the elegiac, valedictory quality of Mozart’s final essay in this form, the sensitive response of the reduced orchestra to Barenboim’s rapt playing like chamber music writ large.

I’m not a great fan of Pierre Boulez’s knotty, atonal musical algorithms, but with the umpteenth cancellation of the premiere of the CSO principal guest conductor’s *Notations V-VIII*, the lack of music with some bite to it was sorely felt. Further, with the wealth of home-grown music to choose from, it’s hard to understand why Copland’s deadly *Lincoln Portrait* got the nod as the obligatory American work, unless it’s the

slender reed of the Illinois connection. Barenboim showed a surprisingly deft hand with Copland's Americana fripperies, while the authoritative and resonant narration of Lincoln's words by seventy-seven-year-old bass William Warfield brought a dignity and resonance to this lightweight occasional work.

The spotlight on the music of Beethoven this season got off to a less than stellar start with a dogged, rough-and-ready performance of the German composer's Fifth Symphony, showing Barenboim in his breezy auto-pilot mode at its worst. There was little to complain about, however, in the conductor's handling of the long evening's closing work, Bruckner's *Te Deum*. Though the CSO Chorus's words didn't project clearly in the new environment, Barenboim managed his large forces with admirable control, building the double fugue of veneration and praise into a heaven-storming finale, a jubilant conclusion to the program. In this Clintonian era of the triumph of surface presentation and "spin" over reality and honest utility, it was the music rather than the venue that managed to remain the message, something in which we can all take comfort.

Concert notes

Pelléas et Mélisande, by Claude Debussy, at the War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco.

With each passing day, it seems ever more certain that Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1902) will be considered not just the first great opera of the twentieth century but also the most perfect melding of music and drama in the modern era. There are, of course, those who would quibble with such a suggestion, pointing out that the work owes so much to Wagner's chromatic harmonies and so-called endless melody as to embrace more a Romantic aesthetic than a modern one. But such arguments miss the larger point: that Debussy's only fully real-

ized opera is far more a harbinger of what was to come than an apotheosis of preexisting modes, and not just musically.

Rather than suggest certainty and the triumph of various virtues, this opera conveys doubt, impotence, confusion, and frustration. There are no arias or set pieces here to express grand emotions; loosely linked tableaux convey the blurry drama. Even the love affair between Pelléas and Mélisande at the center of the opera remains shrouded in uncertainty, unfulfilled if not unrequited. And yet, of late, there have been those who seek to redefine *Pelléas* in more concrete terms, often under the mistaken impression that they are furthering the work's "contemporary" features. In this regard, Peter Sellars's controversial L.A. Opera production of 1995 springs to mind. Reimagining the quasi-medieval *Pelléas* (which Debussy based on Maurice Maeterlinck's 1892 Symbolist drama of the same name) as a 1990s morality play, complete with *verismo* touches, Sellars basically wrecked the work. To be sure, the director deserved high marks for the fertility of his imagination, but the opera is too delicate to withstand such tinkering. The pleasures in this opera are not to be found in its message (whatever that may be), but in its expression. Study the work too closely and the magic disappears.

So what a thrill it was to encounter a production of *Pelléas* that allowed Debussy's and Maeterlinck's vision to flower, chiefly by sparing audiences intrusive interpretation. In this new San Francisco Opera production (which ran from November 9 through December 3), director Colin Graham did not so much opt for a *laissez-faire* approach as make a conscious choice to return to the opera's Impressionist roots. Adopting a dappled design scheme conceived by Thierry Bosquet (sets and costumes) and Thomas J. Munn (lighting), Graham created a visual world to match Debussy's musical one. Just as impressively, the director honored Maeterlinck's peculiar ethos, eloquently articulating the playwright's vague themes.

In its five acts, *Pelléas* tells of a young woman, Mélisande, discovered in a dark forest by Golaud, a grandson of King Arkel of Allemonde. Golaud then marries Mélisande and requests permission to return to Arkel's castle. When the couple arrives, they are met by Pelléas, Golaud's half-brother. Distracted by various pursuits, Golaud leaves his wife in the care of Pelléas. Soon, Pelléas and Mélisande feel an attraction toward each other, and Golaud begins to suspect that the pair's friendship is more than platonic. Golaud even encourages Yniold, his young son by a prior marriage, to spy on the couple. Eventually, Golaud accuses his wife of infidelity, and when he observes Pelléas and Mélisande kissing at a well, he kills his half-brother, who was to leave Allemonde the next day. Later, after giving birth to a daughter, Mélisande once more assures Golaud that her love for Pelléas was innocent. She then dies, leaving Golaud unsure of the truth.

For this production, the young British baritone Simon Keenlyside sang Pelléas, the much-loved mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade, Mélisande. Though they approached their roles differently, each laid claim to a valid, compelling characterization. Keenlyside portrayed Pelléas as a sensitive, excitable youth, fairly bursting with ineffable joy. A lyric baritone, he is just the sort of singer Debussy preferred in the role. And as such, Keenlyside proved near ideal—comfortable in the highs, able to shade his tones, and at ease with the language. Von Stade, a Mélisande of long standing, also sang beautifully. The mezzo is over fifty now, yet her voice remains fresh and flexible, full of color and with a glorious ring at the top. In contrast to the hyperactive Keenlyside, von Stade was a more discreet presence on the stage, gliding coolly through the drama.

Willard White is practically an old hand at Golaud by now, so it's no surprise that the bass-baritone seemed comfortable in this role, his oaklike voice and fearsome demeanor clashing with Keenlyside's ardor. The regal bass Robert Lloyd's Arkel made a

favorable impression as well. And as Geneviève, mother to Pelléas and Golaud, the mezzo Nadine Denize seemed every inch a royal mother, while eleven-year-old Michael Denos acquitted himself admirably as Yniold, a role generally essayed by a woman. In the pit, Donald Runnicles, the company's music director, opted for brisk tempos and a taut, edgy approach to the score. He emphasized the music's chiaroscuro, drawing stark contrasts when needed. It was especially gratifying to hear him point up Debussy's various water motifs.

It's not hard to understand why this *Pelléas* turned out so well. The artists involved simply employed common sense and let the work speak for itself. It's a formula too often dismissed as old-fashioned and limiting, but when the results prove this successful, why object? True opera lovers know when to leave well enough alone.

—David Mermelstein

Psyché, by César Franck,
at the New York Philharmonic,
Lincoln Center, New York.

Psyché, the last and most ambitious of César Franck's *poèmes-symphoniques*, has had more than its share of bad luck. The piece was initially welcomed by critics when first performed in 1888, and was subsequently admired by biographers and commentators, but *Psyché* has never found a secure place in the repertoire.

Part of the problem lies in the genre. Unlike operas and symphonies, which more easily transcend their period, the symphonic poem is very much a phenomenon of the nineteenth century. It impresses most modern listeners as sprawling, sentimental, and without structure. *Psyché* has also had its own particular problems, the most prominent of which was the physical deterioration of the orchestral sheet music. Kurt Masur, laboring over the last several years to reconstitute the score, has tried to rehabilitate this fine work. Sadly his success was only partial. Though the entire piece re-

ceived its New York premiere in October, *Psyché* has still not shaken its curse.

The legend of Psyche can be found in *The Golden Ass* of Apuleius. Venus, goddess of beauty, is jealous of Psyche ("more beautiful than Beauty itself") and sends her son Eros to dispatch her earthbound competitor. Eros, however, has other ideas. Unknown to Venus and unseen by Psyche, Eros persuades the West Wind to waft Psyche to a garden where, as Apuleius delicately tells us, "ut est natura redditum, novitas per assiduam consuetudinem delectionem ei commendarat": "As naturally happens, that which was first a novelty did, by repeated custom, bring great pleasure." As always, however, there is a catch: the two meet in total darkness and Eros warns Psyche not to look upon his face or ask his name under pain of banishment. But when Eros is dozing after one of their sessions, Psyche lights a lamp to catch a glimpse of her lover and is discovered when a drop of hot oil falls on him. Though Psyche is cast out, Zeus (at least in Franck's version) ultimately elevates the lovers to heaven (where, since this is a pagan legend, the couple has a love-child named Voluptata). This was pretty strong stuff for a composer who spent much of his life in the organ loft, wrote works on sacred and Biblical themes, and whose spiritual nature was such that his pupils called him "Pater Seraphicus."

Psyché is in three parts: *Psyche's Sleep*, *The Gardens of Eros*, and *Psyche's Sufferings* leading to an "Apotheosis." The music reminds us that religious devotion is no bar to sensuality. Franck was a master synthesist of other composers' forms and styles, and *Psyché* was directly influenced by Wagner's *Tristan* and indirectly by the advanced harmonic ideas in Liszt's symphonic poem *Orpheus*. Both Franck and Wagner voiced their eroticism through chromatic harmony, most effectively in works with religious or mythical settings. Equally important was Franck's extension of Liszt's concept of the symphonic poem: music, though non-conceptual, can thematically express direct and

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recognizable human emotions. In *Psyché*, for example, the roles of both Psyche and Eros are unspoken, being figuratively expressed by the orchestra. Of course, considerable musical sophistication and orchestral virtuosity are necessary to achieve this. While it is no longer generally believed that music can adequately serve such an expressive end (one man's sunset is another's sunrise), the symphonic poem still stands as a noble, though flawed, experiment.

Not, however, one so flawed as to excuse the treatment handed out to *Psyché*. The reconstruction featured a dramatic narration written by the playwright John Guare and delivered by the actress Cherry Jones. Never mind that the addition of a script undermines the whole premise of the symphonic poem. The contrast between Franck's ethereal yet sensuous music and Guare's silly text could not be more jarring. The narration fatally destabilizes the work at the outset by introducing dialogue that would have been more appropriate to a

TV sit-com. In Guare's treatment, Psyche evolves not as Psyche, but as Narcissus: there is the Naughty Girl ("I'm naked . . . look at my body"), the Coy Girl ("I won't say his name, I'll just enjoy it"), the Peacemaker ("I want nothing of you . . . except your son! . . . I love him!") and the Oprah-Philosopher ("The miracle of love! That . . . is the beginning . . . and the end . . . of life!"), the last bit being delivered by Ms. Jones in a hoarse shout. One has to wonder *what* Mr. Masur was thinking when he commissioned the narrative. With any luck, if *Psyché* is eventually recorded, Guare's script will in the meantime have suffered an even worse fate than befell Franck's score.

About the program notes: Franck wrote six symphonic poems, not five. "L'Ouvreuse" was not a newspaper, but the pseudonym of the music critic Henry Gauthier-Villars. Finally, who translated the verses? Possibly someone who can read French, but certainly not someone who can write English.

—James F. Penrose

The media

Flipping our Whigs

by James Bowman

My plan this month—to return to the subject I touched on last June, of history in the eyes of the journalist—suffered a blow when I tuned in to *The Fifties*, a series based on David Halberstam's book of the same name, which ran on the History Channel in late November and early December. I found that I could not watch more than the first hour and a half of its eight hours. The surfeit of clichés proved overpowering. Of course, one expected the clichés of bad writing (“To paraphrase Dickens,” intoned the narrator with comic solemnity, “it was the best of times, it was the worst of times”), which are a hazard of all TV watching; also, the clichés of political content (Senator Joseph McCarthy does his inevitable star turn as the principal manifestation of “anti-Communist hysteria,” which was created by the American-led “arms race”) hardly came as a surprise. But when the show began closing in on the epoch-making significance of the beginnings of rock ‘n’ roll, I had to tune out. Infantile leftism I can abide, but baby-boomer narcissism has become too much for me.

The point of *The Fifties* is the same as the point of the “Newseum” and virtually every other journalistic foray into history, which is further to establish and solidify as orthodox the latest, baby-boomer version of the Whig interpretation of history. But this version, instead of identifying the culmination toward which all history has tended as the modern liberal state, finds it instead in

the modern liberal media and entertainment industry. Everything in human history has been a preparation for that summit of achievement represented by Tom Brokaw and David Letterman and Bob Dylan. Thus *The Washington Post's* TV Week piece on the series by Michael E. Hill is headed: “A Placid Era? On the Surface, Maybe. But Underneath, the ‘60s Were Brewing.” The Fifties to Halberstam and his adapters would be of no interest without the Sixties, to which they both contrasted and led up.

Hill also gives Halberstam the chance to elaborate on something he said was not fully explained in the series itself, which was the significance of Truman's defeat of Dewey in 1948. “I thought one of the factors that drove the politics of the cold war was Dewey's defeat,” he said.

It meant the Republicans had five defeats in a row and made them feel they would be a permanent minority party. Because they could not seize on economic issues, they seized on Communist subversion. . . . Much of the politicization of the cold war, one party accusing the other of being soft on Communism, came because of those five straight defeats.

You have to admire the imperviousness to experience of such a man, even as you wonder at the continuing power among baby-boom Whigs of the conviction, eight years after the end of the Cold War, that it was all nothing but a symptom of social

pathology and right-wing paranoia. Similar views of history predominate among those who have no other and who (therefore?) watch television drama. On a recent episode of Fox's popular show "The X-Files," a mysterious general explains the same period to one of the series's heroes:

This is the hoax into which you have been drawn. The roots go back fifty years to the end of World War II. Playing on a virulent national appetite for bogus revelation and a public newly fearful of something called the atom bomb, the U.S. military command began to fan the flames of what were being called flying saucer stories. There are truths which can kill a nation, Agent Mulder. The military needed something to deflect attention away from its arms strategy, global domination through the capability of total enemy annihilation. The nuclear card was fine as long as we alone could play it, but the generals and politicals knew what they could not win was a public relations war. Those photos from Nagasaki and Hiroshima were not faces Americans wanted to see in the mirror. Oppenheimer knew it of course, but we silenced him. When the Russians developed the bomb, the fear in the military was not for safety at home, but for armistice and treaties. The business of America isn't business, it's war.

To be sure—and as is typical of the involutioned paranoia which the series celebrates—we cannot be sure that this stuff is not merely disinformation on the general's part. But a much more straightforward statement of the standard left-wing view of the Cold War came in a recent episode of the CBS series "Touched by an Angel" in which angels out of heaven (trust me) help a woman lawyer called Libby clear the name of her father—who, she believes, committed suicide when falsely accused of being a Communist by a friend named Clive. The angels explain to the idiot audience that the blacklist

was a product of the Cold War. It was a time when fear of Communism shattered a lot of

lives and families, like Libby's. You know it all began with naming names. People who were even accused of being Un-American, they lost their jobs. Friends betrayed friends, marriages were broken apart and Libby's father, Bud Glaser, he couldn't work for the last six years of his life, at least under his own name. . . . Some movie people were given the chance to testify in secret, clear their name without a lot of publicity. So Clive just told them the lie they wanted to hear. . . . That committee had him good and scared. Clive did it to save his career.

When asked why, if Bud was not a Communist, he didn't "just clear his name and tell the truth," the angel explains: "Well, Bud tried to, but in those days people weren't looking for the truth, they were looking for names . . . when freedom was not reigning through the land."

Needless to say, freedom only reigned through the land after the multiple liberations of the 1960s. Halberstam is quoted by Michael Hill as saying that "I think the interesting thing is, so much of what happened in the '60s was seeded in the '50s. It may have seemed to be a passive era, but much of this stuff was bubbling under the surface. And technology from the '50s, mainly television, accelerated the pace of life in the '60s." Hill's piece, like the series itself, makes sure that anything of any significance in the Fifties derives that significance from what it led to in the Sixties, which was the decade in which the baby boomers discovered the world, liberated themselves and their successors from traditional social restraints, and then began thinking of themselves as very fine fellows for having done so. Their deeds are now celebrated in story and song, which artistic effusions they confidently expect will carry their fame down to future generations.

It was therefore by a happy chance that, at the end of the week in which *The Fifties* aired, Bob Dylan was one of five entertainers honored by President Clinton at the Kennedy Center in Washington—and the

one whose honoring was seen (by *The Washington Post's* Style section anyway) as having been of the greatest significance. "No less a revolutionary than Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.)," wrote Jacqueline Trescott of the *Post*, "summed up the awe in which Dylan is held." "The idea of even meeting Lauren Bacall is unbelievable. The idea of having met God's associate [Charlton Heston] is almost inconceivable." But "the sheer magic, for I think everyone in my generation, is to finally have our nation recognize Bob Dylan." Later Ms. Trescott quoted the president himself as saying of Dylan that "he probably had more impact on people of my generation than any other creative artist. His voice and lyrics haven't always been easy on the ears, but throughout his career Bob Dylan has never aimed to please."

Meanwhile, in another column, Ken Ringle wrote:

With the first baby-boom president looking on in the Kennedy Center Opera House and a black-tie audience cheering, the usually scraggly-bearded son of Hibbing, Minn.—clean-shaven for the evening—was formally ushered into the social and cultural establishment he once questioned with such stormy eloquence.

Walter Cronkite praised him as "the rolling thunder of American music." Gregory Peck—who turns out to be a longtime Dylan admirer and friend—compared him to Walt Whitman and Mark Twain. In the 1960s, recalled Bruce Springsteen from the opera-house stage, "the yearning in America for an open and just society just exploded. Bob Dylan had the courage to stand in that fire and capture the sound of that explosion. It was a beautiful call to arms." Rick Lyman of *The New York Times* was more succinct, as the spectacle of the former protest king supping with "the Masters of War"—here represented by General Colin Powell—inspired him to observe that "Bob Dylan has met the Establishment, and he is it."

In the same paper's arts pages a week or

so later, Ann Powers offered yet another tribute to the man her headline called a "Poet of the Soul and National Treasure" as he came to perform at Irving Plaza in New York the day after his honor at the Kennedy Center:

Claiming forebears like Jimmie Rodgers, the Singing Brakeman, and the Rev. Gary Davis (whose "Cocaine" he covered), Mr. Dylan mines popular music's founding paradox: that it can be equal parts serious art and light entertainment, the stuff of church and of the saloon. "Time Out of Mind" is not only a dour elegy but also a collection of droll, direct, jilted-love songs, full of playfully obvious rhymes and little jokes on the rhythm-and-blues tradition. If in the 1960's, he recreated the rock star as an important poet and social force, now Mr. Dylan is playing a more traditional role, as a bard of plain experience. In his 50's he prefers not to speak for a generation but to dig at the earthy and equally profound subject matter of the blues: sex, love and getting by. . . . Mr. Dylan's playing was hardly virtuosic; in fact, it was as primal as are his new lyrics. But it was all his, an arrogant expression of the truth in his aging fingers and his still impudent soul.

Still impudent? *Impudent* means shameless, and it is a very interesting question whether Bob Dylan, the Kennedy Center honoree and pop-cultural "icon" (as someone has inevitably said) of the 1990s would himself relish being called shameless at fifty-six. Is it really true that people who are old enough to have children and grandchildren, and whose parents (Mr. Dylan's mother proudly watched him being honored at the Kennedy Center), against whom they once rebelled, have declined into the vale of years, continue to identify themselves primarily as members of a "generation" rather than of a family or a nation?

Mr. Paul Simon, another pop "icon" who is only a year younger than Mr. Dylan, seems to do so, or so it might seem from the subject matter of a new musical written

by him and set to premiere on Broadway in January. Called *The Capeman*, this pop *opera seria* tells the story of a Puerto Rican teenager who murdered two other kids in 1959. All singing, all dancing hoodlums and thugs! How '60s can you get! But of all the kids, even all the ethnic kids, who have murdered somebody in the last thirty-nine years, why choose this one? Partly, I think, because he has that 1950s quality of being a dividing line between the old and the new.

At first, the Capeman, whose real name was Salvador Agron, was sentenced to death, just as such criminals have been throughout history. But, after it was revealed that he came from a poor and troubled background—nowadays he would be said to have been “abused”—and was illiterate, Eleanor Roosevelt and others pleaded for clemency and his sentence was, indeed, commuted shortly before he was due to be executed in 1962. Then he became a writer and poet from his prison cell; he was finally paroled and living in freedom when he died of a heart attack at the age of forty-two in 1986. Simon has belatedly discovered another criminal to be admired from a distance, like Che Guevara or the Black Panthers. Such admiration was one of the hallmarks of the 1960s—the era in which Paul Simon made his name and to which the Capeman and his story might be said to form an ideal prelude.

For Simon shares with many of his fellow middle-aged baby boomers the essentially infantile assumption that the world begins with them. It is also the assumption which underlies Steven Spielberg's *Amistad*, which does for slavery what *Schindler's List* did for the Holocaust—namely, it makes his audience feel cozy in their own virtue. Whatever else they've done, they've never gassed any Jews or flogged any slaves, and nothing more than having resisted the temptation to do so is required of them in order that they should feel superior to all but the greatest men and women of previous generations. These few they single out for admiration on the grounds of their remarkable prescience in holding very nearly

the same moral views that they themselves do.

John Quincy Adams has now entered the new Whig pantheon of nineteenth-century heroes, along with William Lloyd Garrison and Abraham Lincoln, because he had a late twentieth-century hatred of slavery. Likewise, Spielberg holds up for our scorn and detestation not only the hack politician Martin Van Buren but also one of the finest American minds of his or any other time, John C. Calhoun—because they lacked the foresight so closely to resemble ourselves. It is this kind of narrow-minded, anti-intellectual attitude which is responsible for the removal of George Washington's name from an elementary school in New Orleans, because the Father of His Country owned slaves. We can only guess what further amends we shall have to make for our ancestors' sins. Perhaps President Washington's body will be exhumed and hung up in chains, as Oliver Cromwell's was after the Restoration.

If so, it will not be solely owing to the politically correct version of American history that is being taught in our universities but also to popular films like Spielberg's. *Amistad* could not have been made without some such assumption as we find in the headline of the tie-in piece by Susan DeFord in *The Washington Post's* Horizon supplement for school children, which reads: “How the Cradle of Liberty Became a Slave-Ownning Nation.” Of course there is no mystery in this. In the perspective of human history, it is like asking how the cat swallowed the cream. The real story, the story that is not to be found everywhere you look in the world before the nineteenth-century, is how a slave-owning nation became the cradle of liberty. For once the cream swallowed the cat. But neither Miss DeFord nor *The Washington Post* seems interested in that story. Its telling might require them to admire someone other than themselves. Or themselves and the pantheon of heroes approved by the popular culture and represented here by an

emblematic black abolitionist, played by Morgan Freeman, as well as Adams (Anthony Hopkins) and Roger Baldwin (Matthew McConaughey), another white lawyer.

Doubtless for decades to come children will be glad to get neatly packaged doses of liberal humanity from Mr. Spielberg and thank their stars that they learned in time to hate Nazis and slave traders. More worryingly, Spielberg also gives currency to one of the major myths of “black studies”—namely that the slavers routinely threw their human cargo overboard—out of the sheer evil of their natures, presumably. Some of the more lunatic proponents of this view put the number of drowned slaves near one hundred million and claim that the migration pattern of the Atlantic’s shark population was forever changed because of their steady diet of black slaves in the Middle Passage. Debbie Allen, Spielberg’s black coproducer, believes in this version of history, and so there are passages in the film showing slaves being drowned and (oddly if not contradictorily) drowning themselves because of their treatment by the slavers.

Pete Postlethwaite, who appears in the film as the prosecutor of the rebellious slaves, who are only seeking their freedom, brings up the rather obvious point that it is scarcely credible that the slavers—who, whatever else they were, were businessmen—would throw their assets overboard like this. The answer given by the film is twofold. In many cases, when on the point of apprehension by the British, who were trying to stop the slave trade, they would throw slaves overboard to destroy the evidence. As that hadn’t happened in this instance, they fall back on the explanation

that the slavers suddenly discovered that they hadn’t enough provisions for all the slaves, so they got rid of the excess. No one asks why they would have been such careless businessmen as not to have brought enough provisions.

My point is not to argue the merits of Mr. Spielberg’s filmmaking or Mr. Simon’s music or Mr. Dylan’s poetry, none of which I am inclined to put at a high estimation, although some people whose judgment I respect are so inclined. But all of them are much more than artists to the media, where they invariably get the kind of positive, not to say sycophantic, coverage which must be the envy of all those who make their living by being famous. This is because they are all in some way associated with that baby-boomer pantheon of heroes that helps keep the generational sense alive long after the battles of the Sixties are over. What mature poet, you have to wonder, would really want to be “the voice of his generation”? Many would choose to be the voice of a people or a nation or a tribe or a region—but a generation? The idea is journalistic, and not natural. I am of the generation that Bob Dylan is said to be the voice of, and I am thoroughly ashamed of the fact. That is unnatural too, of course. Yet what I am ashamed of is not really my generation (and who, in maturity, is not ashamed of himself at seventeen?), but of the fact that it still exists as a “generation”—frozen in time at late teenage-hood so as to stand fast against those who would “turn back the clock” and undo the accomplishments of the glorious 1960s. For many of those accomplishments must be undone if we are long to survive as a nation.

Horace transplanted

by D. S. Carne-Ross

"What! are you a little touched with the sublime lash?" someone asks in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, scenting an affair of the heart. No footnote was needed pointing the reader to *sublimi flagello* in Horace, *Odes* III.26, for these Horatian tags were part of the small coin of educated conversation. An unworthy purpose for a great poet to serve, one might think, but one that Horace would probably not have taken amiss. A double-dyed ironist, he smilingly collaborates with his own under-reading, and one can imagine him saying, If you want to respond to my verses at this level, feel free to do so. In a poem addressed to a distinguished Roman soldier, he protests his inability to strike the required heroic note:

It falls to me to make up easygoing

Songs about such battlefields as parties,
Epic encounters between young men and
women.

Sometimes I write them because I've fallen
in love.

Sometimes I write them just for the fun of it.

And yet this poet who makes such modest claims for himself can on occasion come out with the highest claims. "But if you say I am truly among the poets," he tells his great patron Maecenas in the first poem of his book, "Then my exalted head will knock against the stars," "Sublimi feriam sidera vertice." These four proud words herald the

work that was to withstand the passage of two thousand years, as he predicted that it would:

Today I have finished a work outlasting
bronze

And the pyramids of ancient royal kings.
The North Wind raging cannot scatter it
Nor can the rain obliterate this work,
Nor can the years, nor can the ages passing.

In the main, however, Horace keeps to the middle range of experience where most of us spend our time. His great gift was to make the commonplace notable, even luminous, not to be discarded as the everyday trivia of existence. By putting a shine on our small occasions, he shows that the daily drab need not be as drab as it often is. We sit slouching at the bar staring morosely into a martini. Horace gives his drinking a touch of ceremony: "The garlanded cup-bearer waiting, and garlanded I, / Here in the shade of the arbor, drinking my wine."

The passages I have quoted come from the translation of the four books of *Odes* which David Ferry has just given us (and of which, let it be noted, I am a dedicatee).¹ He has done what nobody has been able to do since the unjustly forgotten Philip Francis in the 1740s; he has found a voice, contemporary and yet Horatian, through which

¹ *The Odes of Horace*, translated by David Ferry; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 344 pages, \$35.

that poetical wonder, the *Odes* of Horace, can address us. No doubt complete possession is granted only to those lucky enough to be able to read them in the original. This is easily enough said, yet it is not quite true. Has anyone enough Latin to feel it as he can feel his own language? Horace's "Linquenda tellus et domus et placens/ uxor" strikes home hard enough but still not quite as directly as Ferry's simple English words: "Each one of us must leave the earth he loves,/ And leave his home and leave his tender wife." Translation is always needed; witness the amount of Latin poetry that was Englished in the Latinate eighteenth century.

The alert reader of a poem called "Epigram" in Ferry's most recent book of original verse, *Dwelling Places*, might have predicted that here was the Horatian poet of our day should his gift lead him to assume this role.

As with the skill of verses properly managed
the little river quietly makes its way
along the valley and through the local village
below the smiling hospitable house,
easily flowing over the shining stones,
trochee, and an anapest, pyrrhic, and also
spondee,
under the heartbeat easy governance
of long continued metrical discipline.

It is this easy governance, easy only because of long continued metrical discipline, that has allowed him to make an English-speaking poet of Roman Horace. Richard Wilbur speaks admiringly of "the way he finds what English meters will serve each poem, and weaves down through them with Horatian fluency and momentum." Ferry never makes the mistake of trying directly to imitate classical meters; rather, as he himself puts it in the introduction, "sometimes my translation reflects the way I have heard the rhythms of the Latin." Listen with him to the rhythm of the first line of *Odes* I.4:

Solvitur acris hiems grata vice veris
et Favoni.

Now the hard winter is breaking up with
the welcome coming. . . .

Again in the opening of IV.1 where he finds an English equivalent for the half-playful, felt jaunt of Horace's Asclepiads:

Intermissa, Venus, diu
rursus bella moves?

Venus, it seems that now
Your wars are starting again.

More often, though, his stanzaic forms are purely native. The quatrains that answer to Horace's Alcaics have the proper formality of fine verse, not the traditional formality of English poetry but a new formality based on stress count, normally five to a line, rather than syllabic count.

Sometimes he writes agile tercets that link arms and glide down the page, here and there alexandrines, occasionally faux Sapphics where the last line ("watched over by you," "hear the young maidens") echoes or rather alludes to the final Adonic of that wonderful stanza which has held the ear of poets ever since Sappho first sounded it. The first ode of Book Three he does in Pindarics, a noble measure that has been in abeyance since Edward Lear wrote "The Dong with a Luminous Nose."

Ferry's governance is so fine that he has made it seem easy to translate Horace, laying him open to the danger that has often dogged his author, that of under-reading or more exactly under-hearing. The free-verse interregnum has dulled our ears, though this need not have happened had we listened more intently to the master, Pound. Good, even great, poets have written in this century, but the art of verse is now not much appreciated, even by persons known as poetry lovers. A published poet of some accomplishment printed a couplet of Pope's in this form: "The spider's touch, how exquisitely fine;/ It feels each thread, and lives along the line." But Pope wrote "how exquisitely fine!/ Feels at each thread, and lives

along the line.” It is the choriambic movement that enacts the fineness of the touch. Perhaps a term’s attendance at Ferry’s Horatian school will teach us to listen again and to respond to poetry not merely with our minds but with our muscles.

He differs from the major verse translators of this century in that this is not Ferry’s Horace in the sense that the Propertius of “Homage” is Pound’s Propertius. There is nothing here of the radical, even arrogant, remaking that we have in Pound and less successfully in Lowell. In the main, Ferry keeps as close to the original as a verse translator can be expected to do, allowing himself the proper local liberties and omitting details of Roman usage that would not work for us now. In a poem inviting a friend just back from the wars to come and celebrate his return (II.7), Horace goes into the details. They are to cast dice to decide who is to be the pace-setter (*arbiter bibendi*), precious unguent is to be provided for the hair, and a slave is to weave garlands of parsley or myrtle. Parsleyed or myrtled, we might still manage to enjoy ourselves, but not with grease rubbed into our hair. Ferry lets this go and concentrates on the pleasure of the occasion where Horace’s attention goes: “I’ve got good food to eat, good wine to drink;/ Come celebrate old friendship under the laurel.”

It is his skill, a kind of wise tact, in keeping what is essential and playing down, even omitting, the contingent that has made these translations live as Horace’s poems live. Dropping the contingent is, however, easily done. Less easy to handle are those aspects of Horace that reflect the hardness of the Roman temper. It is disconcerting to find this genial poet recalling with apparent gusto the brave days of old when the sea “ran red with Punic blood.” An unwelcome suggestion of Colonel Qaddafi. Ferry—gritting his teeth?—lets Horace speak out. And there is the line that has caused such offense, “Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.” What is to be done with this? Simply translate it: “Sweet and proper it is to die for your country.” In its Roman

context this seems to me perfectly acceptable. When, however, in the fifth of the so-called Roman odes, the half-legendary warrior Regulus advises the senate to allow prisoners of war to remain in captivity and die unpitied, Ferry, finding this a bit much and assuming that it will be too much for us, introduces five words of his own to soften the harsh counsel. The prisoners should be “left—to die if they must—in the enemy camp.” Justifiable? Let the reader decide.

Somehow (a word that critics should no doubt try to avoid) Ferry has been able to bring Horace within our range while including a certain amount that is beyond our range. Although writing in today’s language, he makes us aware that these poems speak, in small and larger ways, from a day or world unlike our own. Wine is drunk there from a cup, not from a glass as we drink it. There, a poet can hope for an eternity of fame that would sound almost absurd at a time when the future of literacy, let alone high literacy, is uncertain. The Horace of Ferry’s deft extraterritorial fiction of a world—which, as in Nabokov’s *Ada*, runs on parallel but not identical tracks with our own—can expect his readers to be at ease with the proud, patriotic stance that would now be written off as braggadocio.

There is a great deal of Horace in this book, a modern Horace as the Horace of Philip Francis’s translation was an eighteenth-century Horace. What we do not find here is “the merely witty, urbane, reasonable fellow who sometimes emerges in English,” as Rosanna Warren put it in a fine article in *The Threepenny Review* (Summer 1997). And yet Horace is witty; he is urbane. Consider only the first line of the poem (III.26) that begins “Vixi puellis nuper idoneus,” “Until lately I lived on easy terms with girls.” How to translate that, Horace blandly turning the tables on those who would mock the complacency of this middle-aged corpulent amorist? Neither Ferry nor anyone else to my knowledge has captured it. Horace is also, to the distress of romantic spirits, rea-

sonable. When do we find this poet's eye rolling in a fine frenzy?

Hence it is that, like no other poet of comparable stature, he has so often been given less than his due. Pound, comparing him with Catullus, wrote foolishly that "Horace has but the clubman's poise." Oh dear, clubbable Horace. No less foolishly, Matthew Arnold complained that he "wants seriousness. [He] warms himself before the transient fire of human animation and human pleasure while he can, and is only serious when he reflects that the fire must soon go out." Arnold then quotes two lines from the great poem beginning "Diffugere nives, redeunt iam gramina campis" (of which we are fortunate to have the version by Housman, as perfect as any translation can hope to be) and issues his verdict: "For nature there is renovation, but for man there is none—it is exquisite, but it is not interpretative and fortifying." We may disagree and claim for Horace precisely the virtue that Arnold denies him: he is eminently fortifying, nowhere more so than in his poems about death.

The poets of this century have not served us well here, and Empson in his poem "Ignorance of Death" speaks representatively when he confesses that he feels "very blank upon this topic" and thinks that "though important, and proper for anyone to bring up,/ It is one that most people should be prepared to be blank upon." It is true that Philip Larkin is hardly blank on this topic, but whatever may be said about the near panic which takes hold of him at the thought of death, it is certainly not fortifying. The poems for friends dying of AIDS in Thom Gunn's latest book, *The Man with Night Sweats*, strike a note of lean, controlled outrage against this dreadful visitant into late twentieth-century life, but this death is still seen as an exception. We will all die, but we will not all die of AIDS. In Horace, there is no panic, no outrage, but rather a calm acceptance of what must be. After the pleasures and sorrows of life comes eternal exile, the day when our number is up and we are assigned our place in

the ferryman's boat that takes us to the world of the dead: "et nos in aeternum/ exsiliium impositura cumbae."

Eternal exile? Horace challenges us here. Christian readers will presumably say that the great pagan poet was simply wrong. Other readers he catches between wind and water, for they, although lacking any determinate belief in survival, may be reluctant to confront so bleak a sentence (and, thus, in this country speak of someone who has died as having passed away). Ferry delicately takes care of their dilemma, or so it seems to me; this may well not be his intention. Committed to preserving the sense of what Horace says, he is nonetheless addressing late twentieth-century readers who like their final prospects to be blurred, and for them he substitutes for Horace's "eternal exile" an undefined region from which we do not return. We take our place "In that dark boat, that bears us all away/ From here to where no one comes back from ever." This is grave and perhaps as much as we can take, but it lacks the flat finality of the Latin. Horace speaks out, facing what he takes to be the facts head on, and by so doing he steadies us. Not fortifying indeed! What can Uncle Matthew have been thinking of?

David Ferry's achievement has been handsomely seconded by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. At a time when books of verse slip modestly before the public, slim little fellows not presuming to compete with the important works of the day—the latest gossip from or about the White House and so forth—*The Odes of Horace* is in every sense a big book, measuring nine inches by six, an imposing presence on the shelf and in our hands. The translations have room to breathe on their spacious pages, and—admirably!—on the facing pages stands the eternal Latin:

EXEGI MONUMENTUM AERE PERENNIS
REGALIQUE SITU PYRAMIDUM ALTIUS,
QUOD NON IMBER EDAX, NON AQUILIO
IMPOTENS
POSSIT DIRUERE AUT INNUMERABILIS
ANNORUM SERIES ET FUGA TEMPORUM.

Back in the Loop

Robert Bruegmann *The Architects and the City: Holabird & Roche of Chicago, 1880–1918*. University of Chicago, 543 pages, \$65

reviewed by Francis Morrone

The history of Chicago architecture is fascinating. The history of the history of Chicago architecture is even more fascinating. “This book grew out of an effort to understand the vast and varied man-made landscape that constitutes the Chicago metropolitan area and its hinterland.” So begins Robert Bruegmann’s study of the Chicago architectural firm of Holabird & Roche. *The Architects and the City: Holabird & Roche of Chicago, 1880–1918* will, the author says, be supplemented by a second volume, covering the architects’ works in the 1920s and 1930s, when the firm became Holabird & Root. The author, a professor of architectural history at the University of Illinois at Chicago, is part of a revisionist band of interpreters of Chicago’s architectural heritage. These historians have done much to rekindle interest in relatively neglected facets of the city’s built environment, in particular the “Art Deco” or “modernistic” towers of the 1920s and 1930s, perhaps best exemplified by such Holabird & Root creations as the Palmolive Building on North Michigan Avenue.

Though never considered the pace setters or form givers that Chicagoans Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright were, Holabird and Roche have been seen as embodying the mainstream of the so-called “Chicago school of architecture” of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Chicago school, for better or worse, has an honored place in the history of modernist architecture, a place accorded by giants no less than Sir Nikolaus Pevsner and Sigfried Giedion. These were the historians who were eager to present a progressivist view of architectural history, in which the modernism of the Bauhaus and the Inter-

national Style could be seen to have risen, with historical inevitability, from the architecture of the past. In Pevsner’s *Pioneers of Modern Design* and Giedion’s *Space, Time and Architecture*, the idea was to establish a modernist pedigree, to enumerate the stages leading to twentieth-century modernism. (In any field but architecture, this approach is labeled *historicism*; in architectural studies, where general cultural literacy is often curiously lacking, *historicism* is used to mean its opposite, i.e., architects who choose to continue to design in traditional styles.) Young architects and architectural historians long tended to swallow whole this Hegelian framework erected by a handful of art historians in the first half of this century, never questioning its often rather startling philosophical presumptions.

The standard history of Chicago architecture goes something like this: the rehabilitation of the city after the Great Fire of 1871 necessitated a sequence of innovations in building construction that, circumscribed by severe economic constraints, produced a new mode of commercial architecture, in which steel-framed office buildings rose with a minimum of aesthetic embellishment. It was largely an inchoate development prompted by necessity, later receiving a kind of *ex post facto* aesthetic rationalization, first in the writings of the Chicagoan Sullivan, then in the writings of various European commentators, from Adolf Loos to Walter Gropius to Pevsner and Giedion. The operative notion is that Chicago in the late nineteenth century provided a foretaste of modernist architecture, and might actually have had some small direct influence on European practice, as codified in Gropius’s Bauhaus in the 1920s. The coup de grâce came when Sullivan wrote about the aesthetic counterreformation of the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, with its promotion of the precepts of the Ecole des Beaux Arts (of which institution Sullivan himself was a product), that the blow dealt to Chicago’s architecture would require fifty years to be corrected. Then, as if on cue, fifty years later Ludwig Mies van der Rohe was installed at

Chicago's Illinois Institute of Technology, fomenting what came to be known as the "second Chicago school." Everything in between, from the Beaux Arts of Daniel H. Burnham to Art Deco, was consigned to the dustbin of history.

The current generation of Chicago's architectural historians, however, has chosen other tacks in its interpretations of this great city. The older approach, particularly as exemplified by Giedion, was grounded in the art-historical methodology of Giedion's master Heinrich Wölfflin. (Intriguingly, the early modernists' most articulate and informed opponent, Geoffrey Scott, also appealed to Wölfflin.) The new historians will have no truck with Wölfflin or with any of the standard art-historical approaches. The new historians prefer to cloud their works with all kinds of extra-aesthetic considerations, primarily a quasi-Marxian adumbration of economic conditions which, while it has uncovered much primary material of great interest, nonetheless has created historical fantasies no less complete and perhaps even more pernicious than those it ostensibly set out to correct.

Bruegmann states that he has "tried to create a framework for discussing the work of the firm outside the traditional plot of the two 'Chicago schools' and to deal with the work not as part of the evolution of 'progressive' styles but as a record of intervention by the architects into the built fabric of the city." It was an enormous task that he set for himself:

Between 1880 and 1940 Holabird & Roche was responsible for thousands of commissions . . . ranging from tombstones and boiler room alterations to entire industrial and institutional complexes. Holabird & Roche worked on programs as diverse as racetrack grandstands and public housing projects, for sites all over the country and abroad, often making it difficult to imagine that the projects were all the work of the same architectural office.

By way of an explanation of the vast variety of the firm's productions, we are

treated to lengthy disquisitions on real estate economics in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Chicago. This is one of the current fashions in the study of American architecture. Where an earlier generation tended to wish to discuss engineering more than art, the present generation seems much more interested in real estate economics than in anything else. What we get, in Bruegmann's as in other recent books, is a treatment of the real estate finance that reduces an intelligent reader to uttering an eight-year-old's *dub!*

That someone had to pay for the buildings; that they were required to return a profit; that design decisions were deeply affected by such considerations—who but an architectural historian would ever have thought otherwise? There is, in so many recent works of architectural history, a deliberate, pervading sense of Gothic foreboding, not unlike that to be found in Victorian ghost stories, except that in the recent works the specter is that of men making money—surely the scariest of ghouls.

That said, Bruegmann's book is a triumph. This is in part because when he gets going, he casts away the trendy political obfuscations that, in his more self-conscious moments, he feels obliged to regurgitate. And, when he writes about certain individual buildings, he shows himself to be an excellent architectural critic.

Indeed, what attracts scholars and some others to downtown Chicago is not its streets' status as artifacts of the expropriation of the working classes, but, from the first, their extraordinary *aesthetic* quality. The Chicago Loop exudes (or did until very recently) a remarkably consistent quality of depth, mass, appropriate embellishment—in Bruegmann's words, "an air of classical solidity, permanence, and repose." The historian Reyner Banham once said that "for sheer commercial splendor, Chicago is the rival of Baroque Rome." That's overstating things a bit, but the point is nonetheless well taken. Of American downtowns, only Chicago's Loop seems to have pulled off the

trick of giving some semblance of hierarchy, relation, and formal coherence to the full extent of its central business district. Explanations for how this came to be have ranged from minute analyses of the engineering and form-defining properties of the structural steel framing of tall buildings, to the latter-day emphasis upon real estate economics, and in particular the desire of the major developers to build as cheaply as possible.

Bruegmann truly seems to understand that it is a bit of both those things, combined with the conscious determination of certain architects and clients to evolve a sort of downtown vernacular that could, in the wake of the Victorian free-for-all, provide regularity and dignity to the rapidly multiplying business blocks of the central district. And Bruegmann is shrewd enough to demonstrate, quite eloquently, how the whole shebang acquired its ultimate coherence largely through the realizations, however fitful, of Daniel H. Burnham and Edward H. Bennett's *Plan of Chicago* of 1909.

At the center of it all stood William Holabird (1854–1923) and Martin Roche (1855–1927). Holabird, the son of a career officer in the U.S. Army, was a West Point-trained engineer who, knowing there was an enormous demand for engineers in post-fire Chicago, got a job there with the technologically pioneering engineer-architect William Le Baron Jenney in 1875. Roche, who had grown up in Chicago and attended its public schools (he had no higher education), had taken a job as a draftsman in Jenney's office in 1872; he eventually became head draftsman. Together with another Jenney employee, the gifted landscape architect Ossian Simonds, Holabird and Roche formed their own partnership in 1880. Simonds soon left, and Holabird & Roche grew into one of the largest architectural practices in the world.

The Chicago firms were organized as businesses, in contrast to the leading East Coast firms, which operated on the atelier system adapted from the *Ecole des Beaux*

Arts. Many of the leading eastern practitioners—preeminently, McKim, Mead & White—considered themselves artists and reserved their best efforts for civic structures, museums, libraries, monuments, and the like. The Chicagoans, by contrast, concentrated their energies on the design of economical buildings for business. And when Chicago got around to putting up its own monumental edifices—e.g., the public library, the Art Institute—it was none of the Chicago architects but East Coast firms like Boston's Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge that were handed the commissions. Just so, when the Chicago developer Bryan Lathrop, who routinely employed Holabird & Roche, came to build his own palatial residence in Chicago's Gold Coast, he selected McKim, Mead & White to design it.

This would change in due course. For one thing, Chicago's most domineering architectural personalities were the Beaux Arts-trained Louis Sullivan and John Wellborn Root. And by the early 1890s, Daniel Burnham, the city's single most successful practitioner, though not himself Beaux Arts-trained, turned to the Beaux Arts with a vengeance—much, ironically, to Sullivan's dismay. Eventually, Holabird & Roche followed suit. It is fascinating to observe the manner of self-education that got them to where, after several false starts, they could design competent, even innovative, classical buildings. Alas, the records are not extant that can give Bruegmann—or us—a solid understanding of how this went, though it is not hard to imagine the dogged, nerdy Martin Roche simply pounding away till he got it right.

From the structurally inventive Tacoma Building (1888–89), through the Marquette Building (1891–95) and the lovely Old Colony Building (1893–94), to numerous Loop department stores and hotels, the firm designed many of the buildings in which Chicagoans did their day-to-day living, working, and shopping.

I do not think I have read better accounts of two of the three Holabird & Roche works that I personally most admire: the

Marquette Building, an office block in Chicago's Loop; and the University Club, on Michigan Avenue. The third, the Cook County Courthouse and Chicago City Hall complex in the heart of the Loop, is not dealt with quite so convincingly by Bruegmann, and I will continue to prefer Carl W. Condit's treatment in his masterly *Chicago 1910–29: Building, Planning, and Urban Technology*, published in 1973. (Bruegmann does, however, quote at length the excellent turn-of-the-century critic Montgomery Schuyler's assessment of this building; Schuyler frequently and admiringly commented upon Holabird & Roche's works.) On the widely influential Marquette design, I do not think anybody excels Bruegmann's nuanced appraisal. And on the remarkable University Club building, a private club built for the city's elite, there is, in Bruegmann's treatment, not the remotest whiff of PC—an occasion, in this day and age, for hosannas. I was disappointed, however, that there was not a fuller treatment of the sadly demolished Republic Building on State Street, which strikes me, from photographs (including one on the dust jacket of the present volume), as one of the more remarkable Loop skyscrapers of its day.

The book is splendidly produced, from the stunning dust-jacket photograph, to its superb documentation, logical organization, and, above all, its magnificent illustrations: I do not recall an architectural book in recent years that was more thoughtfully and beautifully illustrated. There are both current and stock photos, drawings, plans galore, even wonderfully useful schematic topographical charts, all sensibly related to the text. Typefaces and paper density make browsing the 540-page book a delight.

Why then can't the University of Chicago Press's copyeditors manage a comparable level of quality? On page 19 we are led to believe, through ambiguous syntax, that William Holabird died in 1929; the following page has him dying in 1923. Dutchess County, New York, is Duches County in the book. Levi Leiter becomes Levy Leiter.

And so on. These are hardly obscure matters. I have found in recent years that the very worst copyediting is done by the major university presses. I wonder if this is because the presses subscribe to the notions of certain harebrained academics that spelling and sentence structure are tools of bourgeois oppression.

And why must the academic environment be such that Robert Bruegmann is compelled to address certain issues that he clearly would rather not address? For example, Martin Roche was a lifelong bachelor. Right off, in today's academia, this means one thing and one thing only: he had to have been homosexual. Thus, in quoting a colleague of Martin Roche's saying that Roche and his friend the sculptor Hermon MacNeil were "more than brothers," Bruegmann is compelled to quip: "It is tempting, from the viewpoint of the late twentieth century, to raise an eyebrow . . . particularly in light of some of the voluptuous male sculptural figures of Hermon MacNeil, but there is not enough evidence to know how telling this stock phrase may be." Well, if there is "not enough evidence," why bring it up at all? At least this is better than the historian a few years ago who suggested that when Louis Sullivan famously said that a skyscraper should be "every inch of it a proud and soaring thing," he wasn't really referring to skyscrapers. (That Sullivan was a well-known womanizer is perversely adduced as evidence that he was gay!) Bruegmann does not bring up Martin Roche's sexuality again, and well this should be, because, frankly, I cannot conceive of a less interesting subject.

Most distressing of all is a throwaway comment of Bruegmann's. About three-quarters of the way through the book, he snidely refers to "one of the amateur Chicago architecture 'experts,' apparently as numerous then as now." What is troubling is that the amateur expert to whom he refers made, by Bruegmann's own account, an important contribution (an influential study of the fenestration of the County Courthouse building); more troubling still is the

author's clear implication that "amateur" means non-academic. I would like to remind Mr. Bruegmann that each of his own ostensible areas of "expertise"—architectural history, Chicago history, and real estate economics—was pioneered by non-academics, independent scholars, "amateurs." And how sad it is that the one "hegemony" the academics seem not to have a problem with is their own over the institutions and processes involved in the research, writing, and distribution of scholarly monographs.

These reservations aside (and that last one does leave a bad taste in my mouth), *The Architects and the City* is one of the best-written, best-produced, best-researched, and most useful architectural monographs I have read in years.

The irony of it all

Martin E. Marty Modern American Religion. University of Chicago Press; Volume I: The Irony of It All, 1893–1919 (386 pages, \$16.95 paper); Volume II: The Noise of Conflict, 1919–1941 (464 pages, \$18.95 paper)

reviewed by Marc M. Arkin

Well, you can't say you weren't warned. Martin Marty, the Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor of the History of Modern Christianity at the University of Chicago, begins his projected four-volume history of modern American religion with the following sentence: "The theological modernists were male members of the privileged subculture, almost all of them Protestant." The rest, as they say, is coda.

Actually, the introduction should have been warning enough. It tells us that the theme of the first volume, which covers the years from 1893 to 1919, will be "irony," which seems to be the reigning category of postmodern thought. According to Professor Marty, an ironic situation "occurs when the consequences of an act are diametrically opposed to the original intention" and the

"fundamental cause of the disparity lies in the actor himself, and his original purpose." Now, right up front, I will admit that, in another life, I have been known to use irony as a historical theme myself. But, after being bludgeoned with irony by Professor Marty for 319 pages of text—from the book's subtitle "The Irony of It All" all the way to "Conclusion: On Ironic Interpretation"—I promise not to do it ever again. By the way, in case you're curious, the theme of the second volume, which covers 1919 to 1941, is "conflict." Really?

In fact, the two volumes now in print were originally published about five years apart, the first in 1986 and the second in 1991. The University of Chicago Press has recently reissued them, presumably to take advantage of the scholarly interest generated by the Fundamentalism Project, a massive compendium of primary source materials edited by Professor Marty and R. Scott Appleby. In the first volume of the current history, Professor Marty sets himself the task of describing how American religion encountered "the modern," by which he appears to mean a combination of Darwin, science generally, industrialization, urbanization, immigration, and the other changes of the period between the end of Radical Reconstruction in the South and the beginning of World War I. In the second, he extends the discussion to the interwar years, in an account dominated by the Great Depression and the approach of World War II. The first is largely a story told from the inside out; the second, conversely, is told from the outside in. More of this in a moment.

During the five years between volumes, Professor Marty apparently experienced a significant change of heart, a change evident in his more sober assessment of religious liberalism and in his decision to concentrate primarily on the story of those "male members of the privileged subculture," a group now expanded to include Catholics and the occasional Jewish observer. Moreover, the unbearably coy tone of the first volume—epitomized by such chapter headings as "Peoplehood as a Cocoon," "Denomination

as a Canopy,” and “The Carapaces of Reactive Protestantism”—has subsided into chastened sobriety, only occasionally broken by such irrepressible rubrics as “A Culture of Cross-Clefts and Criss-Crossings” and, my personal favorite, “Red Scare, Yellow Peril, White Hoods.” (After all, how often can a work of religious history put you in mind of that old country and western standard, “Red Necks, White Socks, and Blue Ribbon Beer”?) In any event, the two volumes are rather different, and what is true of one is not altogether true of the other, which makes for some difficulty in reviewing them as a piece.

Now, personally I have a weakness for what one might call synthetic histories, the types that tackle a major movement, say the Reformation, or a large chunk of time, say the Victorian Age. (Usually I prefer the one volume variety, but I am willing to branch out to a series on occasion.) Such histories represent a genre that tests the historian’s art to its fullest; it is no mean task to construct a coherent narrative that says something significant about the broad sweep of events and that neither wields the pruning shears too vigorously nor leaves an impenetrable thicket for the ordinary reader. Moreover, the constraints imposed by the medium mean that the author’s selection of incidents, his choice of an organizing theme, his historical perspective, all are readily exposed to the reader and reveal equally much about historian and history.

Professor Marty’s previous foray into this kind of historical writing, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America*, won the National Book Award in 1972, and, even if you disagreed with his thematic take on Protestant nationalism, it was, at the very least, a good book of its type. Unfortunately, the current volumes fall far short of this mark. Not only is Professor Marty’s reading of events rather shortsighted to my way of thinking, but the entire account is deficient in historical craft.

Let me begin with craft. One of the more disconcerting aspects of both volumes is

that there is a great deal of shifting and circling, and, possibly as a result, there is much repetition. Even so, much that needs explaining to the intended lay audience goes unexplained. Professor Marty takes up an event—for example, a papal encyclical introduced without date or title or a premillennial approach to eschatology—discusses it for a bit, drops the subject, and then picks up the thread a few chapters later when all is explained, at least sometimes. This kind of unnerving discontinuity should have alerted him to the fact that something was wrong with his organizational categories. Rather than the sweep of history, what emerges seems to be a parade of individual personalities, most of them rather minor figures—and, as best as I can tell, deservedly so—grouped by whether they embraced “the modern” or developed some strategy to avoid it.

In fact, I believe this disorganization indicates a subtle but significant failing of historiographical vision. The great German church historian, Johann August Wilhelm Neander (1789–1850), observed that there are two ways to describe the historical unfolding of a movement such as Christianity: from the perspective of its own internal development or of its reaction to external events. Now obviously, this will have a major effect on the way the writer tells his story. Henry IV in the snow at Canossa is a big deal if you are telling the story of the medieval church from the outside in; a very small matter if you are telling the same story from the inside out. By and large, for Neander at least, the history of religion was best told from the interior perspective if it was to be a history of religion and not of politics.

Now, Professor Marty is part of this tradition; he explicitly accepts Martin Luther’s view that history reveals God’s work through human agency, which ought to lead to thematic unity, if nothing else. But part of the narrative (and conceptual) problem in Marty’s account arises because he shifts back and forth between interior and exterior perspectives without clearly

recognizing when he is doing so. This leaves some fairly strange gaps—World War I, for example. It also leads to some fairly odd choices, as when he devotes a significant amount of space to the sociologist Vida Scudder, while concluding that her “vision had more influence than her practical effects.” And, in the second volume, when he settles largely on an exterior perspective, he has little of interest to tell us that is distinctive to religion. He has long chapters on the Palmer Raids, the revival of the Ku Klux Klan, immigration restrictions, even the Catholic Worker movement, and spends a great deal of time on prohibition and the policies of the Roosevelt administration. All these things are interesting (although I can think of better places to learn about them), but they leave the reader wondering whether there was any religion between 1919 and 1940. The answer, as Professor Marty well knows, is that there was plenty of it, in the popular form of Fundamentalism and Pentecostalism and in the intellectual movement of neo-orthodoxy, each of which he ultimately treats at some length.

As if this weren't enough, both volumes suffer from a more mundane problem. Beneath all the postmodern posturing, they share a remarkably banal approach to historical explanation. For example, in the first volume, Professor Marty suggests the progressive historians of the early twentieth century—such well-known figures as Frederick Jackson Turner, Charles Beard, Carl Becker, Edward Eggleston, and James Harvey Robinson—can be understood as products of their common effort to seek “personal emancipation” from a midwestern Protestant childhood. Proponents of the Social Gospel, on the other hand, lacked the security of a protecting father in their childhoods, so they sought one in the divinity. With equal insight (if I may be allowed just one last ironical comment), Professor Marty offers that, during the same period, persecution helped Jews and Catholics forge their identities, although in the next breath, he cheerily assures readers that there was

very little real persecution and that most Protestants were easily able to ignore anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic propaganda. As for the very interesting question of why there was so little violence—religiously motivated or otherwise—during the Great Depression, Professor Marty offers the following observation: “The thesis that trauma was preoccupying the cultural center leads to the discovery that potential disruptions from ‘outsiders,’ ‘marginal groups,’ and others did not disturb society at large or even come to public notice.”

This last brings me to a bit of crankiness that may be permitted someone who has read both volumes—every word of them—in close succession. Professor Marty reasonably complains of the “peculiar language of insiders” and the “arcane vocabulary” adopted by antimodernists. Yet, particularly in the first volume, he offers his readers—sometimes repeatedly—such choice phrases as the “hump of transition to modernity,” “rapid Englishing,” “preunderstanding of text,” “hermeneutic circle,” “a common cherishable experience,” to pick among the many. I lost count of the number of times the word *Zeitgeist* appeared, as in, “A church built upon progressive revelation had no trouble with the *zeitgeist*” or, if you prefer, “to complete the sweep by the *zeitgeist*.” And, I spent a few moments frozen with horror contemplating the kind of being one might describe as a “pioneer ecumenical bureaucrat.”

This infelicitous vocabulary is coupled with a prose style that seems to operate on the principle: never use an active voice when the passive can be found. In one chapter that I surveyed, almost every topic sentence contained a passive construction. Where were the copyeditors at the University of Chicago Press, the people who ordinarily save authors from themselves?

But, to return to shortsightedness. In the first volume, Professor Marty sets out to discuss the great variety of religious response to the modern, including the response of many outside the Protestant “core culture,” people he later describes as “the-

outsiders, the religious groups considered marginal, the overlooked classes and sorts of people." In the second volume, he apologizes, particularly to his students, for crafting an account that focuses on "the winners from previous centuries," justifying the choice because it will contribute "to the contemporary debates by showing the trauma of those at the center of the canon." And, just in case we missed his bona fides, he reminds us that, in the great religious and cultural debate, he has chosen to side with the "pluralists."

Well fine, but pluralism carries a tariff that Professor Marty does not seem altogether willing to pay. There is, for example, a serious tension between cosmopolitan respect for other religious traditions and Professor Marty's extremely sympathetic account of Christian missions to convert those of other faiths—and, for that matter, his criticism of liberalism because liberalism cannot generate missionary zeal. Similarly, there is something inconsistent between a commitment to religious pluralism and Professor Marty's exasperation with people of disparate denominational traditions who choose to maintain them in the face of Christian unity movements. Moreover, there is something extremely jarring about the smug note that creeps into his treatment of Christian neo-orthodoxy, a note that I believe those sharing Professor Marty's political views would call "triumphalism." Here, at last, he seems to be saying, is a way to have both left-wing politics and the gospel message of sin and redemption by a transcendent God. For Professor Marty, it's a winning combination by which to reinvest the Protestant church with power and supreme influence in the wider culture—something that was absent from the agenda of those who criticized the whole ethos of "Christ in culture."

Professor Marty's views also lead him to some fairly predictable positions. Christian Socialists are good; social conservatives are not. Fundamentalists are almost invariably belligerent and anti-intellectual; if not, they

exhibit "pathos." Pentecostals are able to generate "group behavior patterns that resulted at least in some measure from their participating within a highly conducive atmosphere." On the other hand, sometimes these positions, while in character, are not so very predictable at all, as in "Judaism and Christianity had always regarded themselves as agents of therapy. They saw healing, wholeness, and unity to be goals in their program for salvation." A Presbyterian deacon of my acquaintance hooted when she heard this. And, to the best of my knowledge, Judaism is not and has never been a religion notably concerned with salvation. In fact, the very existence of an afterlife, while often a subject of popular piety, is a matter of disagreement in Judaism's formal teachings. Remember the Sadducees and the Pharisees, after all? A big difference between the two was that the former denied a personal afterlife while the latter went so far as to believe in the resurrection of the body.

Even Professor Marty's well-meaning descriptions of "outsiders" have a quaint ring to them. In a four-and-a-half-page treatment of Catholic immigrants from Mexico, a page of text and a three-quarters-page picture go to their "superstitious" devotion to Teresa Urrea, otherwise known as Santa Teresa, a bandit with revolutionary tendencies and a reputation among her constituency as a charismatic faith healer who survived a months-long trance. So-called "ghetto Jews" were unlikely to be aware of anti-Semitism in the American West and South; "only very literate Jews would be at all aware of the anti-Semitism in the elite culture of the literary moderns." Non-Italians "gaped in wonder as celebrators at festivals and processions pinned dollar bills on statues of the Madonna, paraded, ate spicy foods, or lit the churches with candles." The Lutherans of the Missouri Synod were "Gemütlich and beery in their own culture"; German Lutherans generally "liked their beer." The Japanese are "an adaptable people"; Chinese temples are run on a "capitalist" system because the right to sell necessary religious articles is a monopoly

given to the “highest bidder.” To state the obvious, these are the very stereotypes that the rest of us would hardly dare in polite conversation. Perhaps there is something to be said for irony after all.

Abiding questions

Helen Vendler

The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets.

Harvard, 672 pages, \$35 (with audio CD)

Katherine Duncan-Jones, editor

Shakespeare's Sonnets.

The Arden Shakespeare. Thomas

Nelson & Sons, 485 pages, \$12.95

reviewed by Paul Dean

“With this key Shakespeare unlocked his heart,” Wordsworth famously declared in the sonnet “Scorn not the sonnet;” to which Browning replied, no less famously, “If so, the less Shakespeare he!” Indeed, if Shakespeare did offer us such a key, it has proved to be extraordinarily badly cut. Probably no part of the Shakespearean canon has attracted a greater amount of nonsensical and ill-founded commentary than that which appeared in a Quarto of 1609 as *SHAKE-SPEARES SONNETS. Never before imprinted* (hereafter Q). So intractable have these poems proved that they only now appear in the Arden edition, Katherine Duncan-Jones having taken over from the original editor, the late Winifred Nowotny. Not that other editions have been scarce, the most notable of the last twenty years being those of Stephen Booth (1977), John Kerrigan (1986), and G. Blakemore Evans (1996). Helen Vendler, meanwhile, has produced not so much an edition—although she usefully reproduces a facsimile of Q together with a modern-spelling version—as a sustained critical meditation on the sequence. She and Duncan-Jones have been aware of one another’s work, and the books are valuably complementary.

To begin with, the scholarly minutiae:

among the “sugred Sonnets” which, according to Francis Meres in 1598, were then circulating among Shakespeare’s “private friends,” were two (now 138 and 144) which appeared in the collection *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599) “by W. Shakespeare”—a misleading attribution by the printer, William Jaggard. Jaggard, according to Thomas Heywood, incurred Shakespeare’s displeasure so much that Shakespeare “since, to do himself right, hath published them in his own name.” This means, Duncan-Jones argues, that Shakespeare sold the poems to the printer of Q, Thomas Thorpe, with the title under which they appeared. Some, therefore, had existed in 1598 (not necessarily just the two published by Jaggard); some may be identified with “sonnetes by W.S.” (if that is Shakespeare, and we don’t know that it is) which were registered in 1600. The bulk of them, however, were probably composed while the theaters were closed due to plague in 1603–4 and 1608–9, and almost certainly they were revised at different stages before Q. Stylometric tests purporting to separate “early” from “late” sonnets on the basis of vocabulary have been overconfident, since Shakespeare’s vocabulary in non-dramatic poetry does not always overlap with his vocabulary in plays, and since the Q version of any one poem may be the result of several strata of revision. Some sonnets are more datable than others (for instance, as Duncan-Jones and Vendler concede, Andrew Gurr has made an attractive case for placing 145, with its pun on “Hathaway,” in 1582, while 123, 124, and 125 all seem to postdate 1600), but precise discrimination is impossible.

It has always hitherto been assumed that Q was unauthorized, but Duncan-Jones believes (and Vendler concurs) that the arrangement was a perfectly regular one, Shakespeare offering the poems to Thorpe because the latter had an established reputation as an accurate printer of authorized texts by Jonson, Chapman, and Marston. Q is more carefully printed than is commonly allowed (for example, it reproduces the brackets around the deliberately omitted

couplet in 126, on which both Duncan-Jones and Vendler have excellent comments) and may derive from holograph copy or corrected scribal transcript.

If we accept an authorized printing, it follows that the order in which the poems were printed was the order in which they were intended to be read, and both Duncan-Jones and Vendler show that the placing, and grouping, of individual sonnets (e.g., 66, 108, 126, 144) often has numerical significance which is lost if they are rearranged. The first hundred and twenty-six are addressed to a young man, commonly identified with "the only begetter of these ensuing sonnets, Mr W.H." to whom Thorpe, apparently on Shakespeare's behalf, dedicated the volume. The last twenty-eight, which display what Duncan-Jones sees as flagrantly insulting misogyny, are addressed to a woman. The identity of both—assuming, perhaps wrongly, that they had "real-life" identities—has been a vexed question and a confounded nuisance. Taking a minority view, Duncan-Jones believes William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke—rather than Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, dedicatee of *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Venus and Adonis*—to be the "lovely boy" (the phrase is from sonnet 126), and she doubts whether the Dark Lady can be identified at all. It was certainly not Mary Fitton, she thinks, or the late A. L. Rowse's Emilia Lanyer (one can hear Rowse, wherever he may be, exasperatedly fluting "Third-rate minds!" at this very moment).

Personally, I have never been able to work up much interest in these biographical questions, believing them to be so insoluble as to make all speculation unprofitable. Nor do I find the matter of Shakespeare's sexuality titillating. John Kerrigan, in his edition of the sonnets, quotes Coleridge's "A great mind must be androgynous." I am willing to believe that Shakespeare was emotionally, perhaps physically, attracted to young men, or to one particular young man. Such a supposition is not new, and must be shocking only to those who sup-

pose that human sexuality is a far tidier business than it usually turns out to be. There is no evidence that he ever went to bed with another man, and no evidence in the *Sonnets* that he wanted to; his plea is rather that the young man should go to bed with a woman, in order to perpetuate his beauty by producing (male) children. Press reports of Duncan-Jones's edition, along the lines of "Dark Lady was Shakespeare's boyfriend," were predictably vulgar, indeed ridiculous if you do a little arithmetic. Duncan-Jones doubts Southampton's candidacy as the "lovely boy" partly on the grounds that he would have been thirty-five in 1609; but William Herbert would have been twenty-nine, and William Shakespeare forty-five. The "young man" sonnets are full of anguish at the ravages of time; they are intensely painful, and deeply sad. Nothing could be further from a proposal for a liberated romp.

Duncan-Jones's would-be bold claim that the sonnets' "homoeeroticism" is here confronted positively, and is newly contextualized within the powerfully 'homosocial' world of James I's court" turns out to be largely politically correct verbiage. All it amounts to, really, is that William Herbert once kissed James in public. This required some pluck, given that monarch's cavalier approach to hygiene, but it is a bit much to deduce from it Herbert's "enthusiastic participation in the homosocial familiarities of James and his minions." What does "homosocial" mean, anyway? One would have thought the court of Henry VIII was pretty much a male preserve, but no one has outed Wyatt or Surrey yet, as far as I know. Herbert was indeed reluctant to marry (a situation which is the subject of sonnets 1 to 17), but he had had a number of affairs—in fact he had made Mary Fitton pregnant—while Shakespeare, let us not forget, was a married man with children. How far does a double life have to go before it simply resolves itself into a single one?

It can scarcely be doubted that homosexual poets existed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but homosexual poetry

hardly exists at all. There's Marlowe, of course: Duncan-Jones quotes no less an authority than Dr. Rowse as stating, in conversation with her, that he (i.e., Marlowe) was "a raving homo." Otherwise, the only example that is ever produced is Richard Barnfield (1574–1626), author of *Cynthia* (1595), the one sonnet sequence apart from Shakespeare's which is addressed to a young man. Duncan-Jones drags Barnfield from his well-deserved oblivion. It is, admittedly, mildly interesting that two poems by Barnfield appeared in *The Passionate Pilgrim*, and that *Cynthia* has a commendatory poem by a certain T.T., who may be Thomas Thorpe. But to argue for a "connection" with Shakespeare on these grounds is flimsy in the extreme. His sonnets remain in this, as in so much else, an enigma. It is not just that we lack evidence; we can scarcely recover the *mentalité* with which to evaluate such evidence as we have.

Helen Vendler's book is weighty—she provides a critical essay on each sonnet, sometimes with diagrams. Where Duncan-Jones's notes often do not, although they easily could, fill the page facing the sonnet they annotate, Vendler has more space and crams it. Vendler's approach is richer, more generous, than Duncan-Jones's, whose commentary can be terse, and, in comparison with John Kerrigan's, uninformative. Vendler, however, justly criticizes Kerrigan's "restricted criterion of lyric value—chiefly, that metaphor is necessary for a good poem" (compare them on 105), while Vendler herself is very good on sonnets (such as 9, 81, and 134) which are never going to be anthology pieces. Since, however, a reasonable test of a critic is whether he or she can find anything fresh to say about a poem everyone agrees is of the first rank, I propose to compare Duncan-Jones and Vendler on 73, which I shall therefore quote in full:

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon these boughs which shake against
the cold,

Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet
birds sang.

In me thou seest the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self that seals up all in rest.
In me thou seest the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
Consumed with that which it was
nourished by.

This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love
more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave
ere long.

This is Vendler's modernized text. It differs from Duncan-Jones's in some accidentals: Vendler omits Q's comma at the end of line 1, Duncan-Jones preserves it; Vendler's comma after "few" in line 2 is not in Q and Duncan-Jones does not insert one; Duncan-Jones prints semicolons at the end of lines 4, 8, and 12 where Vendler keeps Q's full stops; Duncan-Jones keeps Q's comma after "death-bed" (which she prints as "deathbed," Q as "death bed") in line 11; Duncan-Jones keeps Q's comma after "well" in the last line. I am generally in favor of preserving the punctuation of Elizabethan verse where it can be supposed to be authorial, on the grounds that, with its rhetorical rather than grammatical function, it is a guide to reading out loud. In line 4 both editors accept John Benson's clearly correct emendation, made in 1640, of Q's "Bare rn'wd quiers," although only Duncan-Jones justifies it, also noting, as William Empson did long ago, its evocation of "visual recollections of chancels of abbeys left desolate by Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries."

Duncan-Jones's headnote reads: "This sonnet explores the young man's perception of the poet's decrepitude through a series of images of decay, concluding that this strengthens, or should strengthen, his love." The imagery brings together the autumn of life, the skeletal boughs which are also Shakespeare's bald head, the approach of

twilight ("Shakespeare's only use of the word," Duncan-Jones notes, and Vendler observes the temporal correspondence between this period of the day and that of autumn in the year), sleep as a rehearsal for death, and the self-destructive maturing of the body. The couplet establishes both the fidelity of the young man in returning the affection, and the imperative need for him to do so. Duncan-Jones, like Vendler, observes "leave" in the last line echoing "leaves" in line 2, but, again like her, glosses simply as "be separated from." (Neither considers a more beautiful possibility, that the youth's love may, indeed "must," rejuvenate the older man, causing him once more to be a "leaved" tree.)

Against Duncan-Jones's austere explication, Vendler is energetic, exploring the tropes of season, day, and fire—the first two linear models of the aging process, the third adopting a "stratified verticality," the fire lying upon its own memorial ashes. Here the speaker is no longer a denuded tree, a ruined building, or a dwindling light, but is himself "glowing." The third quatrain for Vendler thus retorts upon its predecessors: "Once it is admitted that youth wanes, it is clear that the only locus of true life is the present, which can now truthfully be called by a positive name." "Rough winds" and "black night," the destructive forces of the octave, are exposed as mere scapegoats: "one dies simply of having lived." This is a more searching, and subtle, account than Duncan-Jones offers, and fairly reflects the differences between the critics.

Vendler's commentary has its drawbacks. Her stylistic touch is uncertain (the quotations just given exhibit both clumsy jargon and a certain sober grace), and her penchant for diagrams, while making for clarity, lays her open to charges of an arid approach. Still, a sonnet, being such a limited form, allows the poet scope for minute architectural detail; perhaps Shakespeare did use the equivalent of graph paper and compasses. Vendler is certainly right that a sentimental belief in the lyrical muse will not long sur-

vive a determined attempt to sort out the syntax and grammar of the more challenging poems.

When all reservations have been made about these books, they must be allowed to be far preferable to much contemporary criticism about the sonnets. In the most recent example to come my way, Paul Innes's *Shakespeare and the English Renaissance Sonnet: Verses of Feigning Love* (St. Martin's Press, 1997), sonnet 73 is mentioned in support of the assertion that

the transcendental cannot be reached by a sonnet, and a collection of sonnets, that are so wrapped up in the conditions of their production. This is why the addressor occupies a divided subject position: he recognizes that his position is constructed within ideology.

By comparison with this ugly, grey, sub-industrial Critspeak, drained of all humanity, Duncan-Jones and Vendler are a vital refreshment.

Like Kerrigan, but unlike Vendler, Duncan-Jones prints "A Lover's Complaint" as an essential pendant to the sonnet sequence in a tradition established by Samuel Daniel's *Delia* [...] with the *Complaint of Rosamund* (1592) and acknowledged by Shakespeare in the complaint inserted into *The Rape of Lucrece*. A narrative poem in rhyme royal with a female speaker, "A Lover's Complaint" seems to have been written after 1600, when the sonnets were still evolving toward their final form, and it dramatizes a parallel situation of emotional enslavement to a fair youth whose rejection only heightens his would-be partner's ardor. "This book of sonnets," Duncan-Jones concludes, "turns out to be a book of lies and lying. It explores the negative equation according to which love is blind and poets are liars: love poets, therefore, can tell nothing but lies. Yet there is no escape from these lies." Even less reason, then, to hope for finality in establishing the biographical background of such poetry. The "I" of the sonnets may be fictive, a persona whose relationship with

Mr. W.S. is as elusive as the relationship of either of them to Mr. W.H.

We are left, it appears, much where we began, with layer upon layer of images. Matthew Arnold expressed a still widespread frustration in his own sonnet to Shakespeare:

Others abide our question. Thou art free.

We ask and ask—thou smilest and art still . . .

Some people feel driven to try to “solve” the sonnets as though they were crossword puzzles—to recover “the real Shakespeare.” The lengths to which this obsession can go were demonstrated some while back when *New Scientist* announced that Lilian Schwartz, a scientist with Bell Laboratories, had definitive evidence that the Droeshout portrait of Shakespeare in the First Folio, whose *Gioconda*-like expression probably prompted Arnold’s observation, was modeled on contemporary portraits of Elizabeth I. Was the Queen thus revealed, it was feverishly asked, as patron, collaborator in, or even author of Shakespeare’s plays? Such questions seem to be altogether too timid. Perhaps she was the Dark Lady, and the Lovely Boy in drag to boot. Why not? The capacity of Shakespeare’s life to attract bizarre speculations seems unlimited.

As a kind of “Complaint” to this review, let me cite a new book by Fr. Peter Mil-

ward, S.J., *The Catholicism of Shakespeare’s Plays*, which makes a spectacularly bad defense of a view which, if true (and I believe it is true), is crucially important: that Shakespeare lived and died a Catholic. If you assume that the plays contain topical allegory, he assures us, “it is surprising how everything seems to fall into place.” Indeed it is, for it turns out that those in the know can see that the plays are littered with references to the State persecution of Catholics, priests, but especially Jesuits. As Fr. Milward’s book is not, I understand, scheduled for publication in America, I must pass on, as too good to miss, his explanation of why Polonius is a lampoon of William Cecil, Lord Burghley:

The very name of Burghley seems to be echoed in the Latin form of Polonius, if disguised by the proximity of Poland to Denmark—while the change from B to P might be explained by a Welsh pronunciation (such as the dramatist parodies in Welsh characters like Fluellen in *Henry V* and Sir Hugh Evans in *The Merry Wives*).

Feste’s discourse on Pigrogromitus and the Vapians passing the equinoctial of Queubus pales beside the glorious lunacy of this. Neither Duncan-Jones nor Vendler have found specifically Catholic or Jesuit touches in the *Sonnets*, but anything may happen if Fr. Milward ever looks into them.

Notebook

Peddler's diary

by Mordecai Richler

Vaudeville isn't dead. But the traditional song-and-dance men, jugglers, animal acts, and stand-up comics have been displaced by jet-lagged authors, a far less entertaining bunch, who will read from their works in bookshops on the circuit, wherever at least eight potential customers can be found. On a typical week in Los Angeles, the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* (October 29, 1997) lists no less than eighty peddlers reading in various locations. These include Peter J. Harris, author of *The Vampire Who Drinks Gospel Music*; Mollie Katzen, who has written *Mollie Katzen's Vegetable Heaven*; Terry Berland, who will discuss his very own *Breaking Into Commercials*; Jared Diamond, author of *Why Sex Is Fun*; and a highly suspect "writers' workshop for teenage girls" in Beyond Baroque, out there on Venice Boulevard. To be fair, the same week there are also some better-known scribblers working the territory: John Berger, James Ellroy, Judith Rossner, Arundhati Roy, and Will Self.

September 16, 1997. Montreal. A day before starting out on a cross-Canada book tour, the omens are bad. Striding down Crescent Street, late in the afternoon, bound for my favored watering hole, I am stopped by a gentleman from Vancouver.

"Aren't you Mordecai Richler?"

"Yes."

"Let me shake your hand. I've read everything you've written. I think you're wonderful."

"Well, thank you."

"Now let me ask you a question. What do you do for a living?"

Then there is a letter from a college in Hamilton, Ontario, inviting me to speak: "Your book, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, has long been a fixture in our English classes. Students are amazed to discover you are still alive."

September 17. Toronto. In town to deliver the Donner Foundation lecture, I first submit to lunch with Ms. Jan Wong, a *Globe and Mail* columnist. "How tall are you?" she asks.

"Five foot eight," I say, startled.

"And how tall is your wife?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"I need to describe you." Pursuing her literary inquiries, she asks if our children are getting a Jewish education. "Married to a Jew myself," she allows with a self-satisfied smile. "We have a seder every Friday night."

"That must be a Jewish-Chinese custom. We managed it only once a year. On Pass-over."

Finally, she is annoyed with me. "You're not living up to your reputation. You didn't have much to drink. I think it's because you're trying to impress me."

There's a six-page fax waiting for me back in my hotel room. It's from Knopf Canada. A list of interviews, readings, and book signings I'm to do cross-Canada. I've been wary of morning show TV interviewers ever since one of those relentlessly cheerful

young women squeezed me in for a couple of minutes between a cooking demonstration and a chat with a spiritual healer. Brandishing my novel, she demanded, "Is this a true story or did you just make it up out of your head?"

Publication wasn't always such an ordeal. When I was a young writer, rooted in London, I would deliver my manuscript to my publisher, who would immediately remind me of the unearned advance on my previous effort. When my novel came out nine months later I would sit at home waiting for my cherished friends to call and read aloud my worst review, just in case I had missed it. Those, those were the days when novelists could be condescending about traveling salesmen, men who lugged their sample cases from town to town, but we have long since joined the club. Last time out in New York, I was driven in a limo from bookshop to bookshop, popping in to sign copies of my novel, preceded and followed by other writers in other limos signing theirs. Bookshops can return unsold copies of a book to the publishers, but they can't refund those that are autographed. So the publisher's flack who accompanies authors on these excursions usually says something like, "I'll chat up the sales staff and while they aren't looking, you sign as many goddamn copies as possible."

Bruce Jay Friedman once told me that he had gone to do a signing in a Boston bookshop only a day after his new novel had earned a rave review in the *Boston Globe*. Nobody turned up. "What would have happened," he asked the bookseller, "if my novel had been panned yesterday?"

I have had a somewhat similar experience. Maybe ten years ago, I was invited to Montreal's annual Salon des Livres to sit with the translator of a new French-language edition of *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, our table stacked high with books. Our moment arrived after a voice booming out of a loudspeaker announced to the milling crowd that we were now available for signings at Booth Number Twelve. Ten

minutes passed and nobody came. Finally a man stopped at our table. He pulled out a cigarette and asked, "Got a light?"

September 18. Toronto. My marching orders from Knopf read: "12:30 p.m. *The Globe and Mail* (national) with Liz Renzetti. At Avalon Restaurant (private booth where you can smoke, etc. . . .)" *Private booth? Etc.?* What's expected of me, I wonder.

"3 p.m. 1 hr. *Eye Weekly* magazine (local) with Robyn Gillam (woman)."

Now that I am an aging pro (man), somebody who has been around the block (national) possibly once too often, I don't make rookie mistakes. I will, for instance, no longer do radio or TV call-in shows. Once, at a late-night call-in show in Chicago, I sat around a table with two other writers. We watched, astonished, as the technician in the control booth rapped on his glass window and held up a message for our host: "Remember, Dave," it read, "this is a night of the full moon."

When my turn to sell came, I went on, as required, about the torments of my difficult craft. How hell is a blank sheet of paper and so forth and so on. Then a listener addressed a question to me: "All that's well and good, Mort, but I live on the North Side, and I want to know how come there was no garbage collection this week?"

And now I've been out there peddling for only a few days and I am already weary of the most frequently asked questions:

"Why did you write your novel in the first person?"

"Why not?"

"Do you use a computer, Mr. Richler?"

"No, every morning I slip into my Armani silk dressing gown and monogrammed velvet slippers by Dior, and begin to write with my goose quill pen."

September 25. Fly to London with my wife for British publication of *Barney's Version*. Good news and bad news. Splendid reviews in both the *Daily Telegraph* and *Sunday Times*, but Melvyn Bragg has cancelled my appearance on BBC radio's "Start the Week," and John Walsh, of the *Independent*, no longer wants to take me to

lunch at the Ivy, as I have already been interviewed by Mark Steyn, in Montreal, for the *Daily Telegraph*.

London is still mourning for Princess Diana, whose death proved a bonanza for British newspapers, which increased their press runs by 20 percent, and for florists as well. A friend of mine, stopping at a kiosk to buy flowers for his wife a few days after Diana's death, was told, "Sorry, sir, but there's a 50 percent surcharge this week."

The tabloids, pledged to good behavior after the demise of the troubled princess, have already thrown in the sponge. Tit and bum photographs are back, including, after a brief absence, the *Sun*'s topless page-three girl: "Hello, campers! Say hi-de-hi to Leah, 17, making her page 3 debut today. The Manchester maid used to work in a holiday camp. But she packed her bags so we could check out her chalet nice curves instead. We certainly think she deserves a break in the *Sun*."

Happily, I discover British intellectuals have more serious concerns; namely, was Robin Hood gay? Cambridge historian Barrie Dobson feels Robin was a regular sort of guy. "The relationship between Little John and Robin is interesting," he says, "but with no suggestion to homo-eroticism." However, it ain't necessarily so, according to Stephen Knight, professor of English at the University of Wales in Cardiff. In a coming conference, he promises to look into Robin's taste for cross-dressing: "There will be a discussion about Robin's sexuality—what they were doing in the woods, why were they wearing tights, and that kind of thing?"

Meanwhile, on this sex-crazed offshore island, TV Channel Four has taken a hard look at bisexuals, also known as "greedies," who are disdainful of straights, whom they have dubbed "monosexuals." Professional masseuse and cook Felicity Diamond, a proud switch-hitter, says, "It's not about greed for a number of partners. I want the best, not the most. I have lots of friendships and good relationships and sometimes they

become sexual. When I like people I don't generally care what genitals they have."

October 1. Manchester. My publisher, Chatto & Windus, has arranged for me to do a reading at Waterstone's bookshop, but this also happens to be Rosh Hashanna, so many of my people have cancelled. Militant feminist Andrea Dworkin is reading in another room at Waterstone's. An incurable romantic, Ms. Dworkin has written: "Intercourse remains a means, or the means, of physiologically making a woman inferior: communicating to her, cell by cell, her own inferior status . . . pushing and thrusting until she gives in." On the other hand, she doesn't believe that all men are rapists, which is awfully decent of her.

The *Sunday Independent* has launched a campaign to decriminalize pot, its initiative backed by more than a hundred heavy hitters in business, the arts, science, and politics. They include authors Harold Pinter, Martin Amis, Auberon Waugh, and Fay Weldon; film directors Mike Leigh and Peter Greenaway; numerous doctors and psychiatrists with the most impressive credentials, as well as the marquess of Bath and the marchioness of Worcester. But it strikes me that at least one supporter of the initiative is vulnerable to a conflict of interest charge. He is the Rev. R. H. A. Scott, MA Oxon., who is currently serving four years in the slammer for growing cannabis.

My own feelings are mixed. I also favor decriminalizing pot, but I fear if this campaign were successful in North America it would ruin the economy of Florida, and could oblige many an underpaid Montreal gendarme to live off his salary. It could also undermine the work ethic of muggers here, there, and everywhere.

London, in early October, is still balmy, sidewalk cafés flourishing, but I do notice one change. Strolling down the King's Road, I see an increasing number of bald-headed women. I'm not sure whether this is the new fashion, however ill-advised, or if the women have been treated for head lice. In either case, I am not impressed.

October 5. Montreal. Time to check out a

week's mail. A professor at an Ontario university is writing a paper on minor novelists and wants me to answer twenty-six questions. An eyeglass museum in Tennessee would like a pair of my old spectacles. An invitation to lecture, beginning, "We are a non-profit society. . . ." I read no further. A query from Knopf's publicist in Calgary inviting me to appear on a CBC radio show called Mountain Top Music:

"This interview is a personal profile of Mr. Richler. They have requested the following information:

1. His five favorite pieces of music.
2. The title and author of his favorite book.
3. Where would he like to spend his last days on earth (This can be anywhere: a mountain top, an island, at home, etc.)?"

October 6. Toronto again. More TV, radio, and press interviews, followed by an evening reading at the University of Toronto's Convocation Hall. Afterwards, at the book-signing, I am confronted by a hostile young woman: "I read your last novel, *Solomon Gursky Was Here*. It took me two years. WHAT A STRUGGLE!"

October 7. Toronto. I pick up a copy of the *Montreal Gazette*. Bad news from home, as Quebec's loopy language wars continue.

I should explain that my wife, Florence, and I spend the winter months in London, and, for the rest of the year, we are rooted in our cottage on the shores of Lake Memphremagog in Quebec's Eastern Townships. The nearest hospital, La Providence, is in the neighboring town of Magog, and our family has always been treated with courtesy there. But now there is a scandal. No, perfidy. The alert Rodrigue Larose, of the Movement Estrien Pour le Français, has discovered handwritten signs in *English* on the premises, looseleaf sheets bearing the words "emergency admissions." This is illegal, of course, because the Townships' 44,563 Anglophones make up only 9 percent of the population. "Make no mistake," said a horrified Larose, "looseleaf scribbling is one sure step on the road to full-fledged signs made by professional sign-makers."

Larose is also concerned because the Quebec government intends to introduce English lessons in Francophone schools in Grade 3, instead of Grade 4. Impressionable eight-year-olds, he fears, will be exposed to "contamination." And Jacques Poisson, president of the MEF, feels his crusade against "creeping Anglicization" is a thankless job. "We're accused of being fanatics and narrow-minded bigots."

Obviously not the case, Larose told the *Gazette*, because the MEF allows that if an English-speaking crash victim turns up at the hospital with two broken legs, the victim should be addressed in English. "We're perfectly willing to accept that."

October 8. Ottawa. Reading and signing at the National Public Library. A man asks me to inscribe a copy of my novel "to Judith" and requests that I add a personal message. "Think of something witty," he says.

I protest that I don't know Judith, so I can't add a personal message.

"I doubt that she'll have time to finish it anyway," he says, grabbing the book. "She's suffering from terminal cancer."

October 8. Victoria, Vancouver Island. Midway through my reading, at the Open Space Gallery, the microphone begins to leak music from a local rock station. Among those waiting to have a book signed, there is a pretty young girl. "My mother enjoys your work," she says. Somebody else tells me, "My husband was in your class at Baron Byng High. He couldn't come tonight. Heart attack. One minute he was reading the *Globe and Mail* at the breakfast table, and the next he keeled over." I don't recognize the name, but I say I remember him well.

October 19. Vancouver. Last time I was here, locals were complaining about the influx of Chinese from Hong Kong, and how they had inflated real estate prices. Now the same people are fulminating because so many of the Chinese are leaving, worried that they could soon be taxed on their overseas earnings. Real estate prices are collapsing. My minder says, "The parents return to

Hong Kong, and leave their teenage kids behind in those big houses, just in case. They're usually left with a clothes allowance of forty thousand dollars. White kids hit them for protection money during school lunch hours."

Interview with a woman from the *Western Jewish Bulletin*. She wants to know, speaking frankly, is it true that I'm an anti-Semite?

Item: a story, possibly apocryphal, told to me by a Hollywood film director. Years ago, Daniel Fuchs, a gifted novelist and short story writer, was hired to work on a screenplay in Hollywood with his idol, William Faulkner. Faulkner, a sensible man, did not suffer Hollywood easily. He was drunk most of the time. Following a difficult couple of weeks, Mr. Fuchs said, "Mr. Faulkner, this collaboration is not working."

Faulkner agreed that was the case.

"It's not working," said Fuchs, "because you're an anti-Semite."

"Yes," said Faulkner, "but I don't like gentiles either."

October 21. Florence has to fly home and my flight takes me to Calgary on a cloudless day. The mountains, as always, are spectacular. Last time I was in Calgary, I stopped somebody and asked him if he could direct me to the main street. "We haven't got one," he said.

October 22. At Calgary airport, bound for Winnipeg, I cannot find a copy of my novel in the bookshop. I ask the teenager behind the counter, "Have you got a copy of *Barney's Version*?"

"Jeez. They went so fast, we haven't got any left. But I could order you one from our other shop."

"I don't need one. I wrote it. Now why don't you reorder?"

"Not a bad idea."

At my book-signing at the McNally Robinson Bookstore, in Winnipeg, a young woman says, "My father used to live just upstairs from you on Jeanne Mance Street."

"I remember him well," I say, but I never lived on Jeanne Mance Street.

October 23. Montreal. Home at last. But,

late in January, I will have to set out again, this time on my American book-peddling tour. Last time out, I remember staggering off a plane in Seattle, having already been overnight in six other cities. The minder who met me eyed me suspiciously. "Have you been drinking?" she asked.

"*Certainly not.* But I wouldn't mind if we stopped somewhere before my first interview."

"We can't do that. Your first interviewer is a Mormon."

"They all are."

"I said Mormon, not moron."

"Whoops. Sorry about that."

Back in the early Fifties, in London, I used to drink occasionally with Louis MacNeice in a pub round the corner from the BBC. He told me that he had once been to lecture in Montreal. Two nice club ladies met him at the airport. "I'd like to stop for a drink first," said MacNeice.

"Oh, you mustn't worry, Mr. MacNeice. We'll be serving tea at the hall."

"I mean a drink drink."

So they stopped at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, he told me, and waited for him in the car outside: "You'll find what you want in there."

So the story goes.

Letters

Ronald Knox as translator

To the Editors:

Paul Dean's essay on Ronald Knox (September 1997) was a most welcome reconsideration of the man and his work. But I must take exception to the suggestion made, in connection with Dean's account of the controversies that arose from Knox's new translation of the Bible, that the man's knowledge of Greek was only superficial and hence inadequate to the task.

People may honestly disagree over the merits of Knox's biblical translations. My own view is that they sometimes strive to be idiomatically modern in a too self-conscious way. An overtly contemporary translation is inappropriate for a sacred text that is still used for devotional and liturgical purposes. But to use such disagreement as a basis for questioning Knox's command of Greek is simply nonsensical. Only some sort of deep fraternal animus (or more likely, sectarian resentment over Knox's conversion to Roman Catholicism) can have prompted Dillwyn Knox to disparage his brother's knowledge of ancient Greek.

Ronald Knox's skill in classical languages is attested to by Sir Shane Leslie, who attended Eton with him at the turn of the century. In 1959, reviewing Evelyn Waugh's biography of Knox in *The National Review*, Leslie had the following to say on the subject:

I can remember him at Eton in 1902. The smallest boy in the Fifth Form Select. I sat beside him but I never addressed him a word out of snobbery, for I

was an Oppidan and he was a scholar wearing a gown like a gaberdine! But he had his uses when the terrible Headmaster Warre, looking like a Cyclops in his glasses, sometimes threw the door open, and forty terrified boys in tails rose praying inwardly that they would not be called to construe the Greek. The form master, also frightened, always called on "Knox minor" who could give a reading of Sophocles with a look of innocent assurance, and we all breathed again.

It should be remembered that in 1902 Ronald Knox was all of fourteen years old. Anyone who could construe Sophoclean Greek at that age would be unlikely to have trouble with New Testament *koine* in his mature years.

Joseph S. Salemi
Department of Classical and Oriental Studies
Hunter College, C.U.N.Y.

Meter in English

To the Editors:

Since Ronald Wallace isn't the author of the "target" essay in *Meter in English: A Critical Engagement*, I'm sure he won't mind my responding to Daniel Kunitz's wildly careless, hotshot review in your September issue.

Several of the essay's ten propositions (not: "commandments," as they are explicitly offered for consideration) may be minor, but the one Kunitz singles out as "bafflingly obvious"—"The spondee is a good, and fairly frequent, foot in

English”—isn't. Yvor Winters, Donald Hall, and others—including Susanne Woods and Timothy Steele *in* the book—hold that the spondee does not exist, or it is extremely rare, in English verse. It is odd that Kunitz didn't know this or find it out, since he particularly admired Steele's essay.

Kunitz even messes up the scansion of two lines of Blake's "Tyger," reversing *x* and *.*. But his serious error is mistaking *wordshape* ("Tyger," "burning," "forest") as a primary determinant of meter. Metrical feet, as he should know, cross word-boundaries and even syntactical boundaries (caesuras). "And water'd heaven with their tears" is a line in iambic meter, as are "Within his bending sickle's compass come," "My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground," "Golden lads and girls all must,/ As chimney-sweepers, come to dust."

My purpose in *Meter in English* is precisely to address the confusion engendered by such contradictorily divergent but received opinions as Kunitz holds.

Robert Wallace
Department of English
Case Western Reserve University

Daniel Kunitz replies:

I apologize to Robert Wallace for identifying him as Ronald Wallace, and to Ronald Wallace for erroneously associating him with this book. The reversed scansion marks on Blake's "Tyger" were a printing error.

About Robert Wallace's other assertions I remain unconvinced. I certainly do not believe that the shape of a word determines its meter (words themselves, of course, have no meter), nor did I say so in my review of his book. It is interesting that he chooses a visual metaphor—"wordshape"—to talk about meter, because that, it seems to me, is precisely where he goes astray. He consistently tries to read the meter of a poem instead of hearing it. He attempts to show that "The Tyger" can be read as an iambic poem, but he ignores the fact that it can't be *heard* as iambic. It has a falling meter, and no rationalization can change that.

What does it *mean* to say a spondee (or any foot) is "good"? It either exists or it doesn't. Throughout his essays, Mr. Wallace mixes prescription and description, a fundamental fault, which, I felt, confused the very issues he set out to clarify.

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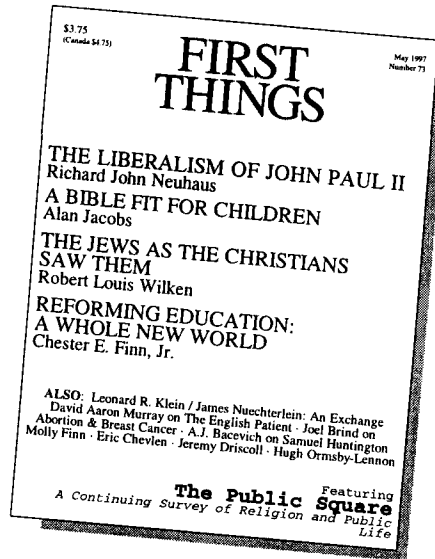
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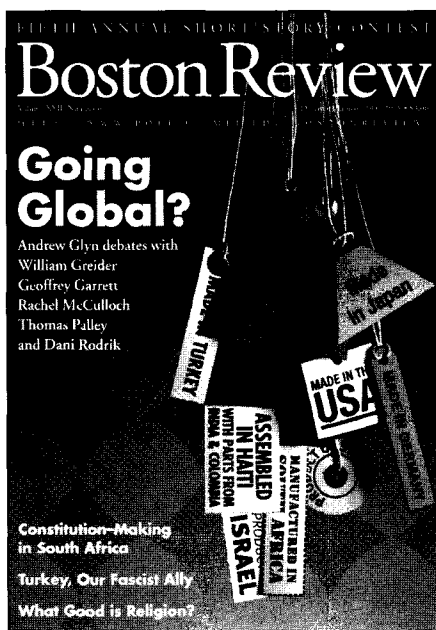
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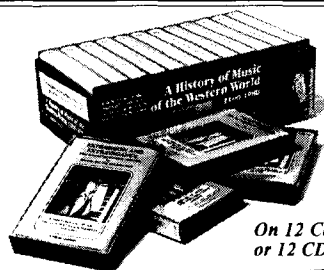
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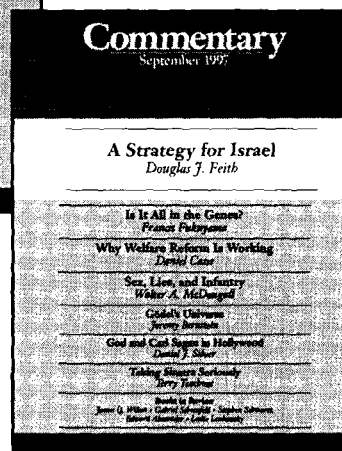
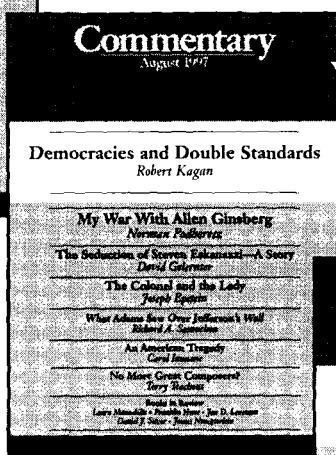
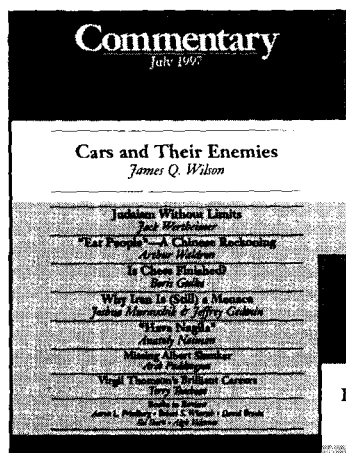
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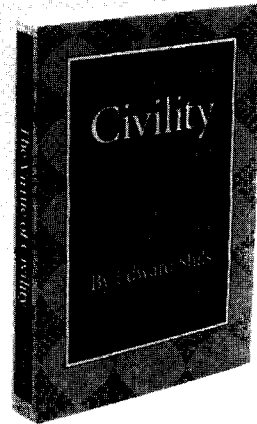
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